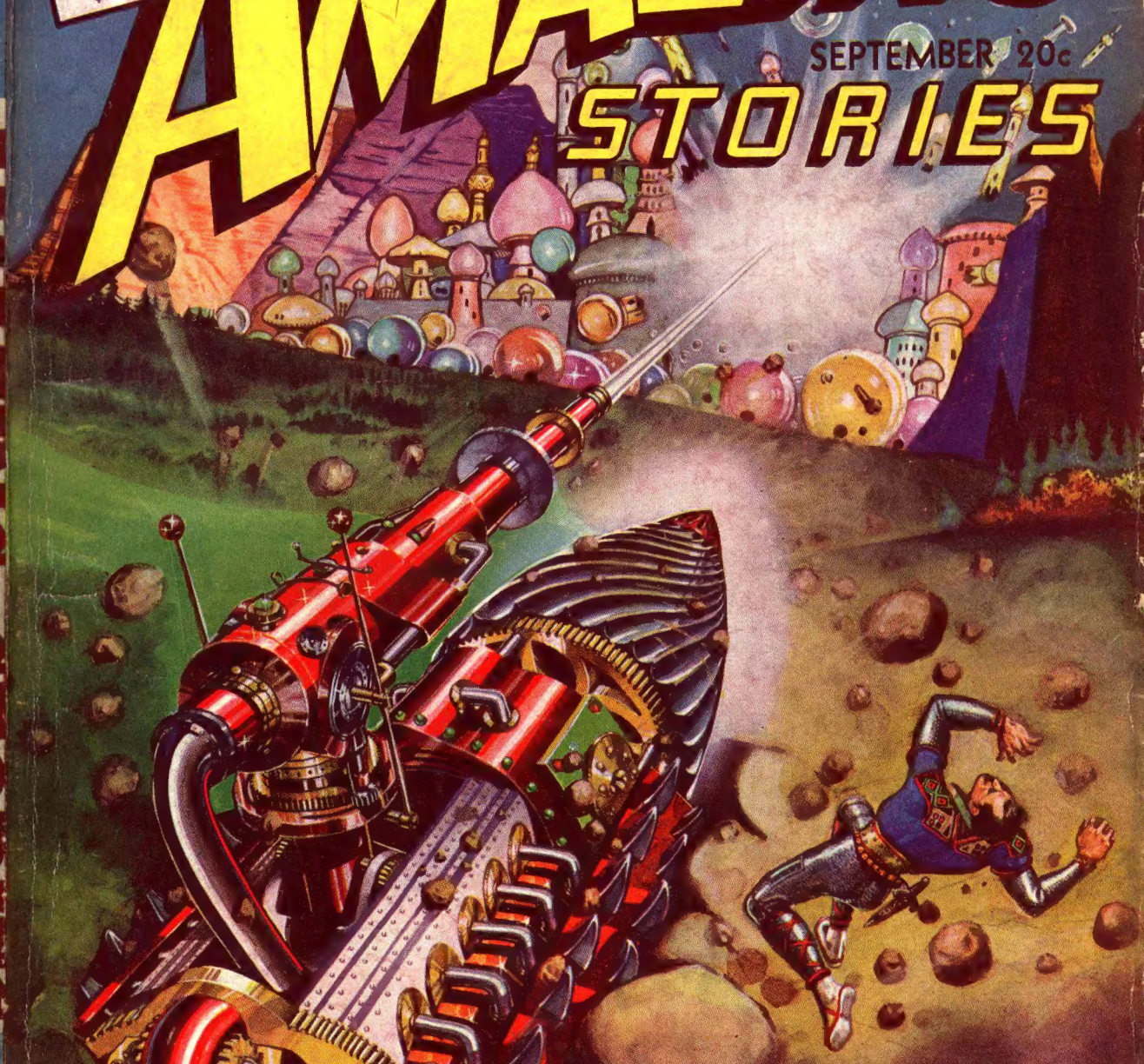
YELLOW MUD FOR COWARDS by P. F. COSTELLO

See Back Cover

AMAZING STORIES

SEPTEMBER 20c



ENCHANTRESS of LEMURIA

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

VOLUME 15 NUMBER 3

AMAZING STORIES

SEPTEMBER 1941

It's annoying when folks just drop in... *but*

infectious dandruff

is more annoying still!

Get after it with LISTERINE at the first sign of trouble

What makes the infectious type of dandruff so annoying, so distressing, are those troublesome flakes on collar or dress . . . and the scalp irritation and itching . . . that so often accompany the condition.

If you're troubled in this way, look out—you may have this common form of dandruff, so act now before it gets worse.

Has Helped Thousands

Start right in with Listerine Antiseptic and massage. This is the medical treatment that has shown such amazing results in a substantial majority of clinical test cases . . . the treatment that has also helped thousands of other people.

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Thousands of users have marvelled at how flakes and scales begin to disappear, how much cleaner and healthier their scalps appear. And remember:

Kills "Bottle Bacillus"

Listerine kills millions of germs on scalp and hair, including Pityrosporum Ovale, the strange "Bottle Bacillus" recognized by outstanding dandruff specialists as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

This germ-killing action, we believe, helps to explain why, in a clinical test, 76% of dandruff sufferers showed either complete disappearance of or marked improvement in the symptoms of dandruff within a month. Lambert Pharmacal Co., *St. Louis, Missouri.*

The Treatment

MEN: Douse full strength Listerine Antiseptic on the scalp morning and night. **WOMEN:** Part the hair at various places, and apply Listerine Antiseptic right along the part with a medicine dropper, to avoid wetting the hair excessively.

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage with fingers or a good hairbrush. Continue the treatment so long as dandruff is in evidence. And even though you're free from dandruff, enjoy a Listerine Antiseptic massage once a week to guard against infection. Listerine is the same antiseptic that has been famous for more than 50 years as a mouth wash and gargle.

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Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you could do this—and if you could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

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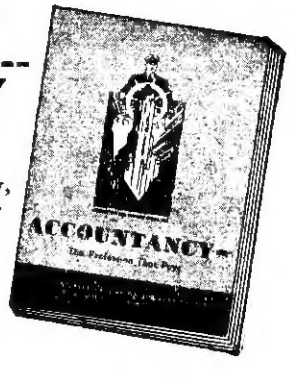

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SEPTEMBER
1941

AMAZING STORIES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

VOLUME 15
NUMBER 9

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Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul depicting "A City On Mercury"
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AMAZING STORIES SEPTEMBER 1941

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Volume 15 Number 9

DO WE HAVE TO DIE?

Is there a Power within that can give Health, Youth, Happiness, Success?

Can we cast off all fear, negation, failure, worry, poverty and disease? Can we reach those mental and spiritual heights which at present appear unattainable? To these eternal questions, the answers given by Edwin J. Dingle, Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, are unusual. He reveals the story of a remarkable system of mind and body control that often leads to almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind, achievement of business and professional success, and new happiness. Many report improvement in health. Others tell of magnetic personality, courage and poise.

The method was found in remote and mysterious Tibet, formerly a forbidden country, rarely visited by outsiders, and often called the land of miracles in the astounding books written about it. Here, behind the highest mountains in the world, Mr. Dingle learned the extraordinary system he is now disclosing to the Western World.

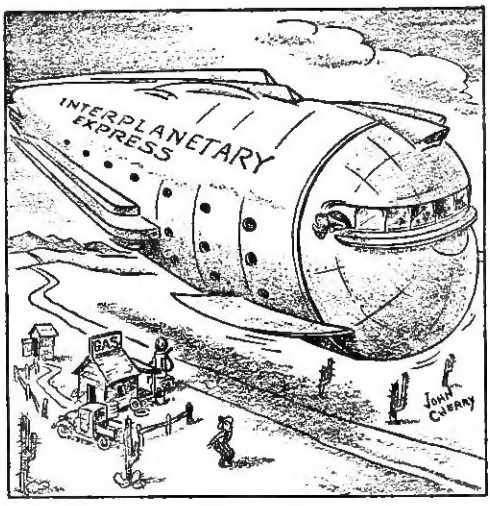
He maintains that all of us are giants in strength and mind-power, capable of surprising feats. From childhood, however, we are hypnotized, our powers put to sleep, by the suggestions of associates, by what we read, and by various other experiences. To realize their really marvelous powers, men and women must escape from this hypnotism. The method found by Mr. Dingle in Tibet is said to be remarkably instrumental in freeing the mind of the hypnotizing ideas that paralyze the giant powers within us.

A nine-thousand word treatise revealing many startling results of this system is now being offered by the Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. 38E, Los Angeles, Calif. They offer to send it free to any readers who quickly send their names and addresses. Readers are urged to write them promptly, as only a limited number of the free treatises have been printed.

The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

DID you know that among the readers of AMAZING STORIES (and also our companion magazine, *Fantastic Adventures*), there are groups of readers who have formed local (and not so local) clubs and who publish semi-regular news sheets concerning their activities (mostly) and the news about fantasy fiction that they deem "hot off the griddle"?

The other day one of these came to our desk, via Uncle Sam's harassed carrier, and we noted a few choice tidbits in its pages—so choice that we pass them on to you for what you might deem them worth. In case you're interested, the magazine in question is titled "Eclipse."



"Fill 'er up!"

"MAGARIAN isn't a new artist at all," says one columnist, named "Artiste," "just one of the old members of Amazing's staff."

Tsk, tsk, Mr. Artiste, Mr. Magarian is a free-lance artist who calls on us weekly, and has never done any work before, on or off our staff.

FURTHER on, a writer named Don Burtom announces that Bond's *Priestess, Horse-sense Hank,* and *Lancelot Biggs;* Wellman's *Hok;* and Binder's *Adam Link,* have been barred from our magazines. Interesting news to your editor, who was editing an Adam Link at that very moment! And we thought *we* were publishing a fiction magazine! How do you get that way, Don? 'Sall wet, we bawl frantically. Our characters have no bars on 'em!

STILL another "columnist" says the stories, without exception, "stink." Which gives us the opportunity to put in a "brag" right here.

If you didn't already know it, Phil Stong, the famous authority on worthwhile short stories, and publisher of any number of anthologies of "bests," has published a new one called "The Other Worlds."

This book contains "the best modern stories of free imagination since Dracula and Frankenstein." There are the twenty-five best stories of this type in the past decade, selected from 20,000 published and unpublished stories.

And in its pages are David Wright O'Brien's "Truth is a Plague," Donald Bern's "The Man Who Knew All The Answers," and Eando Binder's "Adam Link's Vengeance." Three of the twenty-five best are from the pages of our magazines. All of which makes us feel pretty good, and ought to give columnist Bridges some food for thought.

ALL of the foregoing is simply one side of a battle that rages between a host of amateur magazines issued by "fans" over which is best and which is worst in the fantasy field.

And we do say, in honor to them all, that we are pleased as punch to get so much ink, even if we innocently get in the middle. But then, somebody's got to take the "negative" in any argument! But confidentially, boys, AMAZING STORIES and *Fantastic Adventures* are 1 and 2 (or 2 and 1) on our list—and unanimously so on our readers' list, which is where it counts. Which makes it our duty to reply to the fan magazines and assure our readers that they'll keep right on getting everything they like—and *nobody* is barred!

NO doubt you've noticed that there are seven stories in this issue instead of six. This extra treat comes because we have dropped the Science Quiz, and have cut down on the Discussions pages

(Continued on page 60)

FALSE TEETH

$6.85 to $35.00

—BY MAIL—

SEND NO MONEY

Posed by a Professional Model

THE TESTIMONIAL LETTERS WE PUBLISH are communications that customers have sent to us without solicitation and without pay. We have large numbers of such missives. We never print anyone's letter without previous consent. We believe that each of our customers who has written to us enthusiastically indorsing our dental plates is sincere. We do not, however, intimate or represent that you will receive the same results in any instance that those customers describe. What is important to you is that when you pay for our teeth, WE GUARANTEE IF YOU ARE NOT 100% SATISFIED IN EVERY RESPECT WITH THE TEETH WE WILL MAKE FOR YOU, AFTER YOU HAVE WORN THEM AS LONG AS 60 DAYS, WE WILL GLADLY REFUND EVERY CENT YOU PAY US.

BEFORE **AFTER**

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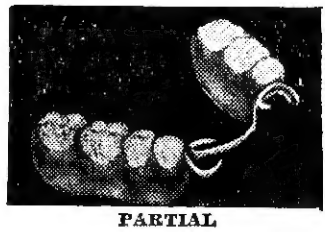

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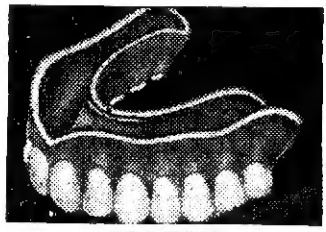

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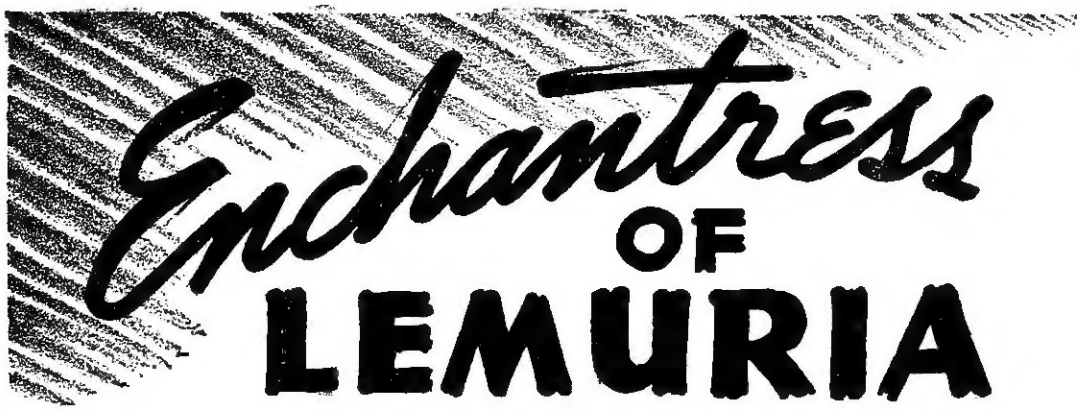


by STANTON A. COBLENTZ

"I'M at the club, Will. Why not come down and we'll have one of our old-time tete-a-tetes over the dinner table?" I listened expectantly for Will Claybrook's voice in the receiver.

As it came to me now across the wire, it struck me as strained, remote, and singularly lacking in interest, almost like a voice from some other world.

"No—no—can't. All tied up—can't get away—not one minute."

"Well then, maybe tomorrow?"

"No, not tomorrow. Not any evening. I'm too busy, Tom. Better come up here if you want to see me . . . Good-bye!"

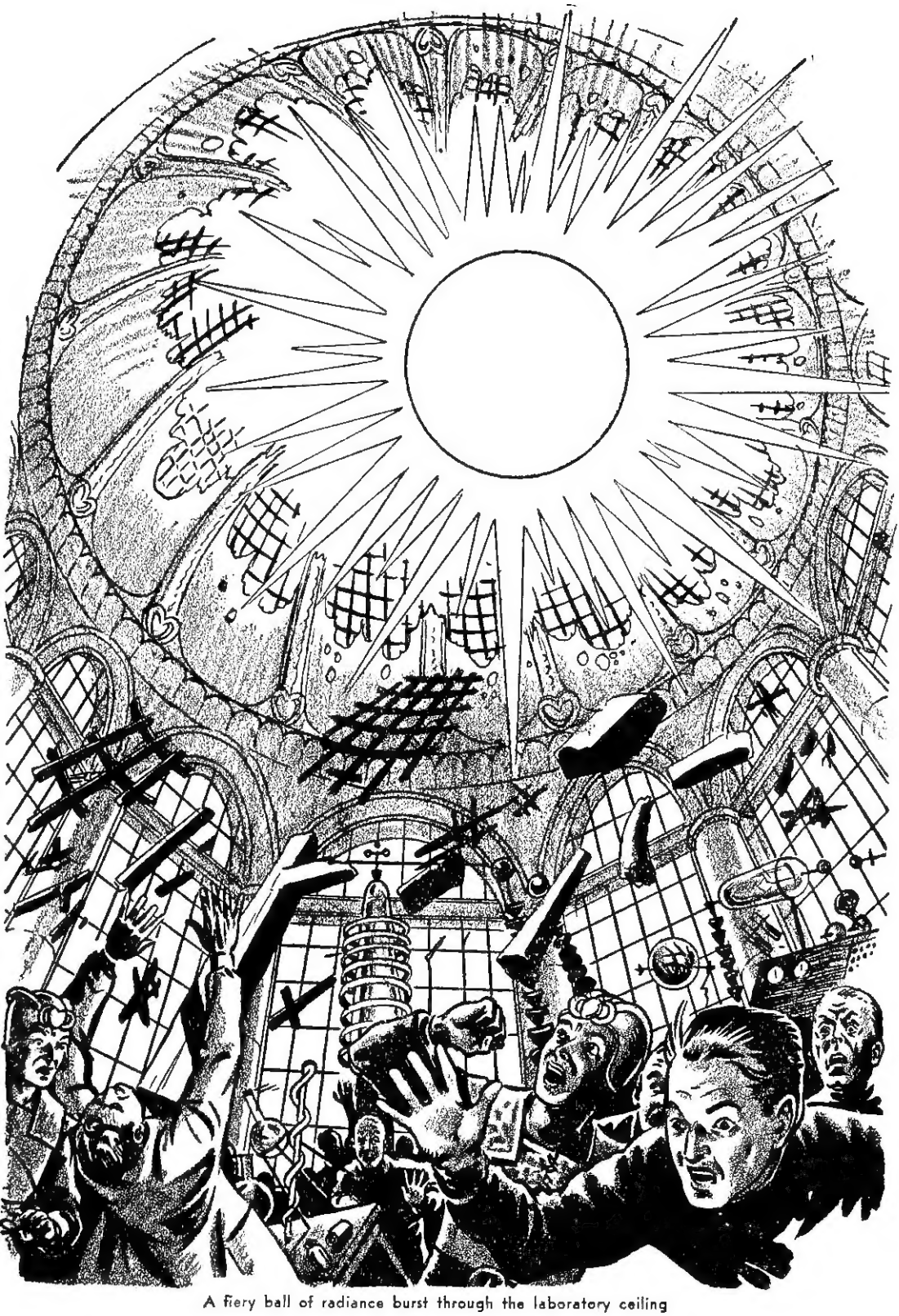
Had it been any one but Will, I would have muttered, "To hell with him!", and promptly turned to something else. But I was used to Will and his ways; he and I had been chums since we were freshmen at college; and knowing that he was doubtless deep in some new experiment, I determined to step into his laboratory that evening. I had been away on a long business trip and I was anxious to see him; he was my best friend.

He had already been working at inventions for more than ten years. Ever since his graduation from college, when he had been employed as an engineer by the Rowney Bridge and Construction Works, he had been spending his spare hours in his small but well equipped home laboratory. "Rod-and-Shuttle Claybrook" was the nickname some of the boys gave him; although to his intimates, of course, he was always simply "Will."

I can still see him as he was in those days, a gangling six-footer, with a rail-thin body, a slight stoop, clothes perpetually shabby, and a long, lean, bespectacled face with a gigantic domed forehead and clear blue eyes with as innocent and yet intense and alive a light as I have ever seen in any human countenance.

But I doubt if there were many who could understand that rarely intelligent

WILL CLAYBROOK invented a means of seeing deep into the earth—and saw an incredible city far underground; and an incredibly lovely girl too



A fiery ball of radiance burst through the laboratory ceiling

and eager soul, whose one passion, whose one devotion was science, to such an extent that he lived like a hermit and hardly seemed aware of the existence of the so-called "gentler sex".

It was my own confident belief that Will would end in a position high among the world's great inventive geniuses. It might take him years; but from what I had seen of his Multi-Tone Pocket Radio Receiver, his Manganese-Nickel Airplane Protective Antennae and his Super-Magnetic Sound Detector, I expected him to take a place side by side with Marconi and Edison.

Most of all, I had been impressed by the chemical which he named Blue Nitrolene. I know little of the formula of this accursed substance, except that it was a compound of nitrogen, carbon, sulphur and phosphorus; but I have seen how it acted as an *atomic catalyzer*. That is to say, the heavier and more complex atoms broke down in its presence, to the accompaniment of an enormous release of energy; gold could literally be converted into iron, silver into lead, etc.

NEVER will I forget the time when, under careful control, Will injected a milligram of the sea-blue compound into a glass container filled with fifty pounds of steel. Instantly there was such a seething and bubbling that the metal disappeared in a mist, the glass melted, a furnace heat encompassed us, and, had it not been for the immediate application of a powerful stream of water, the laboratory and its occupants might have been written of in the past tense.

"Good heavens, Will," I exclaimed, when I had begun to recover from the shock, "what's the object? Suicide and murder?"

"Guess I measured the damned stuff wrong. Might have put in a tenth of a milligram too much," he apologized, as he dolefully brushed back his thinning sandy hair.

"What you intend to do with it? Commit wholesale massacre?" I gibed.

"Well, in a sense," he returned, gravely. "Can't imagine anything better for wiping out an enemy in case of foreign invasion. But the Government, curse it, can't see things that way. Gave a demonstration to an agent night before last, and he swore he wouldn't handle it with a seven-mile pole. Seven-mile pole! That's the very phrase he used!"

"Can't blame him! That's how I feel, too!" I grunted.

Nevertheless Will went on, in his solemn, heavy voice, to declaim against the imbecility of government agents.

ALL this was in my mind as I made my way expectantly toward Will's house at the outskirts of town. But, though I was anticipating some new invention, how little did I foresee what awaited me!

Will's eyes, as he mumbled a greeting, had an animation even beyond their usual enthusiastic glow. His whole face seemed illuminated; he moved with the oddly excited and yet preoccupied manner of a man who follows some inner light.

He scarcely took time to ask, perfunctorily,

"Well, how's things, Tom?" But, leading me in among the flasks and wires of the laboratory, he broke out, irrepressibly,

"Come, this way, this way, you're just in time. Got something to show you. Just step over this way, and you'll see *her*."

"Her?" I echoed, wondering if my friend could be suffering from a brain storm.

A look of pleasure, almost of delight

radiated from that thin, intellectual face.

"Yes, her," he repeated; and I noticed that his features had indefinably softened. "The sweetest, most charming, most beautiful—but come, you'll see for yourself!"

His tones, his manner, it came to me with a shock, were no longer those of the woman-shunning hermit. They were those of a man in love!

But had my friend gone crazy? For surely no maiden, however ethereal, could be hiding among the wheels, rods and tubes of the laboratory! There was scarcely space for a cat to conceal itself!

"Quick, or she'll go away!" he directed, impatiently; and pointed to the eye-piece of an instrument that reminded me of a hand telescope, except that it was turned earthward, and was connected with a long series of prisms and lenses and with an intricacy of wires that made a low continuous whirring.

He turned a dial, and a blue light widened at the base of the machine. There was a crackling as of remote muffled thunder; a green spark shot up and died. But I still wondered what vagary had possession of Will as I took my place at the eyepiece and peeped through with a squint.

"Now, now, quick, tell me! What do you see?" he popped out, impatiently.

"Not a darned thing!" I returned. For all that I could make out was a confusion of dancing lights and shadows.

"Wait, I've got to adjust it to your eyes!" he went on, giving the dial another twist.

Again the lights and shadows danced; then gradually they began to take definite shape, and I had the sensation of one who peers through opera glasses at a remote stage.

"Well now, now do you see?" Will demanded. "Do you see *her?*"

I did not see any *her*. But what I did observe was enough to make me wonder if we were not both out of our heads. Surely, it was all an illusion, an hallucination! Those incredible sights were not real, could not be real!

IT seemed to me that I was looking down into an enormous cavern in the earth; a cavern as wide as whole counties and as deep as a mountain gorge. Just below me (or so it appeared, as I stared through the glass) a city spread, of such a construction that at first I did not know if it were a city at all. In fact, I might have mistaken it for some outlandish vegetable growth, had it not been for the weird silvery light that suffused it, in places tinged with amber, lavender or pale green.

The palaces (for so I thought of them) were all gracefully curved, some of them shaped like gigantic bubbles, some of them like immense mushrooms that glowed iridescently with an inner illumination. Here was a group of little blue-tinted dwellings that looked oddly like a cluster of hydrangeas; yonder was a domed temple that may have been of glass, and that changed gradually in color through pink and rose to violet and indigo. On curving walks that branched among the fairy-like buildings, little shapes that I took to be men and women were moving in a leisurely fashion; but they appeared too remote to be observed in detail.

"Well, now do you see *her?*" Will's excited voice dinned in my ears.

I was too fascinated by what I did see to pay any heed to those words.

"Oh, Lord, just look what I've done!" exclaimed my friend, slapping his thigh in intense irritation. "Switched the dial back to 'Distance.' Of course, you

don't see her. What an idiot I am! Well here, now you'll get a close-up!"

A sharp whirring rang out in my ears; the bubble towers vanished in a surge of reeling shadows; then, after a second or two, a new scene formed itself before my eyes.

"At last! At last do you see?" Will fairly shouted.

I was looking down at an alabaster court between two of the great mushroom-shaped buildings. At one side, the rainbowed spray of a fountain was visible. I could see that the walls of one of the palaces was covered with strangely beautiful painted inscriptions; while, upon glowing pedestals, I noticed the busts of venerable-looking bearded men, and women with faces like the Venus de Milo.

"Now, you numbskull! Tell me, do you see her?" insisted Will, with growing impatience.

"All I see is the busts," I reported, wondering if my poor friend could be so far lost as to have fallen in love with a stone image.

"Then she's gone away!" he groaned. "She's gone away! Didn't I tell you to hurry?"

EVEN as he spoke, however, my attention was caught by a figure that glided slowly into sight. And instantly I understood what it was that had enchanted Will. I, too, though I had believed my romantic days well behind me, felt my pulses fluttering just a little at sight of that queenly being.

But "queenly," I am afraid, is too pale a word to describe this sorceress who, with movements like music, passed briefly across my view. Not that there was anything about her of conscious witchery; she was young, not more than seventeen or eighteen; and her face, with the big lustrous violet eyes shining from beneath a moderate forehead crowned with auburn hair, beamed with the smiling innocence of one who is wholly untainted and unspoiled.

I fear, however, that it is beyond my powers to convey the impression of beauty she gave, more like a Grecian goddess than a mere mortal as she ambled on her way, clad in a robe of some shimmering cobweb substance that reached barely to her knees and left the shapely calves exposed above her sandaled feet. Her complexion was pale —almost of the traditional milky white; and her expression, as she burst momentarily into laughter (almost as if to ridicule me as I watched her!), was indescribably clear and bright.

I am ashamed to report it, but I was left babbling and incoherent as she drifted from view, followed by a peacock with magnificent outspread fan.

"Ah! So you've seen her!" exclaimed Will, not needing the confirmation of my words. "Isn't she just about like heaven itself?"

I nodded; while Will greedily took my place at the eyepiece. But after a glance, he sighed,

"She's gone, curse the luck! She's gone! Don't know when I'll get a glimpse of her again!"

But for a long while he continued to stare steadily through the instrument.

MEANWHILE I was gradually regaining my sanity, and a thousand and one questions were popping into my mind. What was the great cavern I had just seen? Where was it? What were the mushroom palaces? Who was the maiden on the rainbow-fountained court? How had Will been able to see them through his instrument? Were they things that existed on some other planet? Were they mere reproductions, through a time machine, of segments of a remote past?

These thoughts, and others as fantas-

tic, flashed through my mind in rapid succession; but it was long before I could wean my friend away from the eyepiece and pry any semblance of an answer from his lips.

"Why, it's all very simple," he explained, as he absently fingered a dial marked *Remote Control.* "It's all done through the Pellucid Depth Ray."

"What under heaven's that?"

"Guess you wouldn't understand if I told you, Tom. It's a sort of subterranean television machine."

"Subterranean television machine?"

"Yes. In other words, a machine to see through the earth. I thought you would have guessed. What do you think you were looking at, anyway, except a scene ten or fifteen miles below your feet?"

"Ten or fifteen miles below my feet? My God, Will!"

"Oh, the Pellucid Depth Ray can see much further than that," he declared, with an expression that seemed to say, "This is mere child's play."

"But how? How is it possible? No ray known—not even the cosmic rays—have anything like that penetrating power."

"Well, the word ray is perhaps a misnomer. Let's go back to the principle of television. Certain scenes are converted by electrical means into mere vibrations in the ether, from which they are converted back again into scenes upon a screen. In the same way, the events occurring beneath the earth's surface give rise to faint—very faint—electrical pulsations, which I am able to pick up by means of my machine so as to reproduce the original scenes. Of course, I have to amplify the impressions more than a million times. But is there anything more surprising about that than about other accomplishments in television and radio?"

"No, no, I suppose not," I admitted, reluctantly. "But how did you find this cavern in the earth? And what in thunder do you think it is, anyhow?"

"You know as well as I what it is," he returned, with a shrug. "Guess it'll take a whale of a lot of investigating to clear up that mystery. But how did I find it? Simplest thing on earth! Merely turned the Pellucid Depth Ray straight underground, looking for whatever I could find, until I came across this wonderful cavern. However, it was days before I saw any sign of *her.*"

"Forget about her!" I counselled, not liking the dreamy look that had come into his eyes. "It won't do you any good, Will, brooding over a girl you'll never see except at long distance—"

"Oh, won't I!"

HE shot toward me with electrical suddenness; and flung me a glance that was challenging, almost defiant.

"What's to prevent me from going right down into the cavern—yes, and meeting her face to face? What's to prevent me, I'd like to know?"

"Holy Jerusalem, Will! You don't mean to say—"

"I mean to say I've got it all planned! What do you think I've been so damned busy about, anyway? It's taken me days of slow labor, but the Depth Ray has located a small tunnel that leads up from the main gallery, connecting with one of the natural caverns in the Whitley Range a few miles west of here."

"And you think—think you can find that cavern?"

"What's to prevent me, with the Depth Ray for guide?"

"But you wouldn't be damned fool enough—"

Sharply, almost angrily, his interruption flashed out.

"See here, Tom, better keep your comments to yourself! When I've made up my mind on any matter, then it's

made up—and I was never more set on anything in my life than on this expedition down to the Great Cavern, as I call it. Just look! I've got everything arranged!"

He flung open a small closet door, revealing a neatly packed knapsack.

"Everything I need is there!" he rumbled on. "Concentrated food; water; flashlights; a camera; photographs of our country, and so on. Day after tomorrow I set out!"

I stared at him, stunned.

"Day after tomorrow? Mean to say you're going to do this alone—and on foot? Why, man, you'll never come out alive!"

"It's worth any risk," he declared, with a smile. "Yes, well worth any risk! Just think what an opportunity—to explore another world!"

"But good heavens, Will, why all the rush? Why don't you wait a while? Why not organize a party—"

The light in his eyes was far-off, exalted, almost ecstatic. "No, no, I can't wait! Can't! Not one hour more than need be! I must get down there to see—to see *her!*"

As I saw the flushed, nervous manner in which he began ranging about the room, I knew that arguments would be futile. That lovely creature in the Great Cavern had caught him beyond my power to save! And when, a little later, I bade him farewell after vainly trying to extract some further details of his plans, it was with the feeling of one who leaves a soon-to-be-executed friend.

To this day, I doubt if he was fully aware of me as I sorrowfully shook his hand and slipped from the room.

"See, there she is again!" he cried, as he took his place at the eyepiece of his infernal machine. "There she is again! Good Lord! Isn't she the most glorious thing God ever put on this earth!"

CHAPTER II

A Challenge to Death

TWO or three days after my talk with Will, a sensation was caused by the discovery of his Brighton coupé, parked in a barren gorge of the Whitley range, not far from the entrance of one of the many limestone caverns that thread the region.

As no man in his right mind would deliberately abandon his car in that desolate district, it was assumed that he had met with mishap or foul play; and searchers, scouring the hills or exploring the caves with lanterns, expected nothing better than to come across his mutilated remains.

However, no trace of him was found, except for a penknife which had evidently been dropped by chance deep in one of the caves, and which some of the party believed may have belonged to Will. But this point was never definitely decided; and after a time, for want of clues, the hunt was abandoned, and "the mysterious disappearance of William Claybrook" was accepted as a thing beyond human explanation, and was gradually forgotten.

Doubtless many of you will remember the newspaper story of the rescue of William Claybrook and an unknown woman, who were on the verge of death by starvation and exposure, many months later. But little, really, is known of the story behind that news item, or of the mystery of the whereabouts of Claybrook during the intervening months. It was assumed that he had lived, somehow, in a mountain retreat, but was finally forced to seek civilization again when his food supply was destroyed in a landslide.

But now, after the passage of more than two years, I have persuaded Will to let me publish the true story of his

extraordinary adventures in the subterranean world fifteen miles below the surface, for he did reach it.

I shall pass very briefly over the beginnings of his experience, since the sequel was so much more striking. After leaving his car, he plodded for hours through the caverns of the Whitley Range, weighed down with the fifty pounds of his pack, and guided by a map which he had made by means of the Pellucid Depth Ray.

From tunnel to remote connecting tunnel he forced his way by the beams of a flashlight; through passages so narrow that he had to crawl on hands and knees; over perilous watercourses; down sheer rock ledges, and into sections where no man had ever penetrated before. A dozen times he skirted the edge of death; fifty times he had to halt from exhaustion. Sometimes he lay on a limestone shelf for an hour or two of badly needed sleep; sometimes he fancied himself to be lost amid the labyrinths; but always he pressed on and on, and down and down and down—

IT may have been partly through good luck that he at last reached his goal; though he maintained that it was all a matter of careful planning. At any rate, at a depth of more than five miles he faced his supreme difficulty. The heat at this point was torrid, the heavy air almost unendurable. He had stripped to the waist, and yet sweated continually; but still he forced his way on—until stopped by a solid barricade of rock. This he had seen through the Ray machine; and this he had prepared for by means of a stick of dynamite.

Personally, I would never have had the nerve to insert a charge of high explosive in that subterranean recess; but Will was prepared for just this act; he lit a time-fuse; retreated to what he thought a safe distance, and waited with more confidence than most men in his situation would have shown.

In that narrow corridor, the force of the explosion must have been terrific; Will admits that he was momentarily stunned. But the next instant, recovering himself, he felt a cool breeze blowing over him, and knew that he had blasted open the entrance to the Great Cavern.

In the Cavern itself, all was coal-black—which did not surprise Will, for he knew that the lights went on and off periodically, as if by a clockwork arrangement—sixteen hours on, and eight off, with the regularity of the Old Faithful geyser.

"Good! Luck's with me!" he muttered to himself. Then cautiously he crept forward, feeling for his foothold inch by inch, for it would be unsafe to betray himself by a flashlight. After a perilous hour, he had groped his way out of the narrow corridor, and had the sense of great spaces opening about him, although everything was still as black as a blind man's world.

From his observations with the Depth Ray, he knew that he had come out on the side of a hill, which he had termed the Golden Ridge, because of its peculiar tint. It was now his purpose to feel his way down the hillside, toward a cluster of bubble palaces; then, upon the return of the light, he thought, he could safely introduce himself to the natives.

But he had been a little too sanguine. No sooner had he entered the Cavern than a confusion of cries met his ears —cries of consternation and terror, which arose in a great disturbing chorus, some near, some far, punctuated by sharper screams and calls, as if the entire populace had been aroused.

This, however, Will was prepared for in a measure, since he could hardly

have expected the noise of the explosion to go unnoticed. Yet he had not anticipated such a general alarm.

Beneath the overtone of agitated cries, there were rustlings and flutterings in the night; sounds as of feet pattering, of robes swishing, of excited movements to and fro.

Warily the intruder began to creep down the hill, feeling his way inch by inch; but he was conscious of presences all around him, of stealthy forms moving close at hand through the darkness. He had to use all his power of will not to betray himself by turning on a flashlight; but at the same time he felt, he almost knew that his movements were no secret to the invisible watchers.

"Gulm titsum gulm!"

THESE may not have been the exact syllables of the challenge that rang forth, abruptly, almost within arm's length; but these were the words, as nearly as Will could afterward recall them.

Terrified, he stopped short.

"Gulm titsum gulm!"

Twice the phrase was repeated. Then a greenish phosphorescent light, larger than a man's head, broke out just in front of him, not more than five feet away, with a dull uncanny illumination by which he could vaguely see a crowd of staring faces.

Wonder, dread and dismay were registered in those countenances. He could see how some of the spectators started back in repugnance, with cries as of men who have unexpectedly encountered a dangerous beast in the dark.

Sliding down to his hands and knees, Will tried to slip off into the shadows. But another phosphorescent greenish light burst out, and he saw that he was surrounded.

If ever he regretted his rash adventure, it was at that moment. His heart hammered; his breath came fast; he thought with bitter longings of the tunnel he had just left.

A moment passed, while he listened to the voices whispering; whispering rapidly and sibilantly, in that same unknown tongue. Then, out of the green-streaked shadows, a tall figure approached, carrying a machine that resembled a large insect-sprayer. He pressed a little bulb; a long tube, like a rifle-barrel, shot out toward the startled observer; and from this tube a rain of fine vapor was showered over Will.

The victim coughed; gasped; had a sensation as of strangling, with an odor as of garlic in his nostrils; then felt a numbness coming over all his limbs, and sank to earth, possessing no more power over his muscles than if they had belonged to some other person.

"Bult zimplol thim!" he heard a voice, rapid and excited. And two figures bent down and slipped heavy straps about him, until he was scarcely able to squirm; after which he felt himself being lifted, and borne away on several pairs of stout shoulders.

NOT until long afterward did he learn how he had been so swiftly found and captured. He did not as yet realize that his presence and exact location had been revealed by a machine known as the "Man Detector," which recorded the faint electrical vibrations given off by the human brain, and so made it possible to discover the exact whereabouts of any man at a distance of several hundred yards.

Likewise, he did not know that the vapor-showering machine shot out a gas which, while leaving no permanent effects, temporarily paralyzed the mo-

tor nerve centers, but left the brain otherwise unimpaired. All that Will really understood, in that terrifying moment of his capture, was that he was helpless in the hands of beings endowed with unheard-of scientific powers.

For possibly two or three miles they carried him, through thoroughfares absolutely blank except for the circles of greenish phosphorescent light. He had no idea where he was being borne; he only knew that he was accompanied by a crowd, for he could hear the padding footsteps, the low voices whispering in that queer-sounding tongue. Where were they taking him? To what new terrors? To what inescapable doom?

While these thoughts were sweeping through his mind, suddenly he was dazed by a flare of lights. The pitchy gloom of midnight had given place all at once to the silvery glow of day. Dazzled, Will did not realize for a moment that this was but the normal end of one of the eight-hour periods of darkness, the beginning of one of the sixteen-hour intervals of light. In bewilderment and wonder, he was staring up at a ceiling a thousand feet above, on which multitudes of bulbs flamed in pleasing geometrical patterns. He noticed again, as he had done through the Depth Ray, that the ceiling was supported by concrete columns which, tapering upward like inverted funnels, were each many yards thick at the base and were separated by intervals of close to a quarter of a mile. But, most of all, he was amazed at the palaces.

Mushroom-shaped and bubble-like, as he had seen them from above, and glowing iridescently with a light from within, they were like the temples of a dream world; and were far more beautiful now, in their pastel colorings of cream and lavender and amber and sky-blue, than when seen by means of the Depth Ray.

In the courts, between the buildings, flowers such as Will had never seen before were blooming: orange-yellow roses as big as dahlias, and blue-and-gold dahlias as large as a man's lap, and rainbow-hued blossoms of types that Will had never seen before; while lemon-winged birds flitted among the trees and sang with a melody surpassing the nightingale.

Now that he had a chance to see his captors, his fears began to leave him. These men, with their clear blue eyes, broad high brows and sensitive open countenances, did not look as if they would inflict deliberate cruelty; although their lips were set, and there was a stern and determined look on their faces as they jogged along at an unhurried pace.

AFTER a time, they paused before the largest building of all—an edifice of many-domed crystal, with cupolas and spires that changed constantly in color, in a manner to outrival the chameleon. Will had a glimpse of something that looked like an elevated railway, which ran behind the building; multitudes of individuals were gliding back and forth upon a lacework bridge—a bridge composed of two great movable platforms, one running in each direction—the local means of solving the transportation problem!

He also had glimpses of other queer contrivances, including a deep chute from which men and women were hurled into air like corks from a popgun, to go drifting gracefully to the ground beneath shimmering parachutes. He was fascinated by the tubes which rose from the earth, and from which drafts of air were constantly pouring, as from the ventilators in the cabins of modern steamers; and, for the first time, it occurred to him that the temperature was pleasantly cool,

although according to all calculations, considering the depth, it should have been insufferably hot.

But Will had little time for such thoughts and observations. He was carried through a small oblong doorway into the crystalline edifice; down a long arched corridor that glowed with translucent rose and gold, and into a great vaulted chamber where dozens of men in long flowing robes were squatted cross-legged on the floor.

On entering, each of Will's captors reached down and touched the floor three times with his left hand, while uttering what sounded like a mumbled prayer. Then, arising, they approached a platform in the center, where an impressive-looking individual was sitting, also cross-legged, upon a platform of purple velvet.

This dignitary, white-bearded and venerable-looking, and clad in a shining white mantle, looked down at the newcomers with a grave and yet benignant expression.

"Bludel? Bludel? Bludel?" he said, in a manner of gentle inquiry; and fixed Will with a gaze of patriarchal authority.

Will's attendants replied, with obvious meekness and respect; and pointed to him continually during the conversation, which lasted ten or fifteen minutes. One word kept recurring as they addressed the white-mantled one:

"Timur, Timur, Timur!"

Will could not but recognize this as the name or title of the magistrate—for such he took the figure on the platform to be. And he had the uneasy sense that his fate was being decided.

But the decision, when it was made, remained a mystery to Will. Timur leaned down, pointed to the captive and made a series of slow and sonorous pronouncements, while his followers listened deferentially. Then the men bent down once more, and each touched the floor three times with his left hand; after which they started away, bearing their captive, still paralyzed, down a long, dimly illuminated gallery that slanted into the depths of the earth.

CHAPTER III

The People of the Abyss

AFTER being carried through endless labyrinths, Will was locked in a subterranean room, where he was to remain a prisoner for many weeks, while being regularly fed and cared for. Each day a long-robed dignitary arrived, who spent hours with him, teaching him the native language and customs; and thus after a time he was able to solve the mystery of the Great Cavern, and to learn who its people were and how they had come to dwell underground.

The country was called Le-Mur; and its people were descendants of the ancient Lemurians, who had inhabited the Pacific continent that sank beneath the ocean thousands of years before. At the time of the disaster, when tidal waves and volcanic eruptions of unparalleled violence were laying the country waste, a ruling caste of thousands of men and women had been able to retreat underground to cavern shelters which they had prepared against precisely this emergency—scientists having foretold the cataclysm many years in advance.

Equipped with all manner of mechanical devices, they had been able to survive even when the disturbance had sealed the galleries by which they had hoped to return to the upper world. They manufactured their food synthetically, creating carbohydrates, proteins and edible fats by the transformation of the mineral oil of the

earth. They had a system of interatomic lighting, which kept their homes illuminated with but slight expenditure of energy. They maintained a fanning and ventilating system which worked perfectly, aided by the constant release of oxygen from various metallic oxides. They cooled their galleries by electrical refrigeration, employing the earth's internal heat to generate the electricity. And they had gradually, in the course of many centuries, expanded their subterranean domains, which now reached for hundreds of miles, with interminable branching by-ways and corridors and occasional enormous caverns like the one which Will had discovered.

As generation after generation led its life underground, a prejudice had begun to arise against the sunlit world above—even a fear, a superstition against the People of the Upper Air, as the surface dwellers were known. In the early days, some of the Lemurians had indeed escaped from their cavern life, and had entered the "Upper Air," never to be heard of again.

But as time went by, such escapes had been severely frowned upon, and at length had been forbidden, under threat of death; the tunnels connecting with the earth's surface, which had been built long before, were carefully sealed, and the very secret of their location was locked in archives known only to the Committee of Elders. "Le-Mur for the Le-Murs!" was the motto. To make contact with the peoples of the Upper Air, reasoned the statesmen of the Caverns, would be to end Le-Mur's blessed isolation, and to bring down no one knew what manner of "foreign plagues and devils."

FOR many centuries, according to the accounts Will heard, the life of Le-Mur had really been blessed. In their bubble palaces, the people had led an existence that was wise, sane and beautiful; protected from overcrowding by scientific regulation of population; and shielded from want by an equitable system of distribution, which gave to every one all that he required of every commodity, and allowed to all alike ample time for recreation and for pursuit of art, learning, and personal hobbies.

But of recent years, decay had set in. The life of Le-Mur, although still as smooth as ever on the surface, had been penetrated by a deep, gnawing disease, which was fast chewing away at the foundations. This was not, indeed, told to Will by his instructor; but this he was to learn, in a striking fashion, after he had been in Le-Mur for three months and had, through studious application, acquired a fair knowledge of the language.

He had often wondered for what end he was being trained; and why such evident care had been taken to drill him in both writing and speaking Le-Murian. But he assumed that the natives desired to learn from him something of his own country—if a Martian explorer were to arrive in America, would our first thought not be to teach him English? The main question in Will's mind was whether, once his training was completed, he would be kept a prisoner; or whether he would be released, to explore the cavern-world, and perhaps—perhaps!—to meet the fascinating woman he had seen by means of the Depth Ray.

One day, after a long session with his instructor, who pronounced his work "Satisfactory! Very satisfactory!", he received a summons, which sounded through a little speaking tube high up on the wall:

"The Timur desires an audience, the Timur desires an audience with the man of the Upper Air! Let him follow the yellow line, and take the violet Running

Platform at the left-hand side of the third corridor to the right!"

No sooner had these words been spoken than, with a loud clattering, Will's prison door burst open. Emerging, he saw a line of yellow light, which he followed down several curving galleries, until he came to a place corresponding, roughly, to a railroad station on earth. Dozens of movable platforms, laden with passengers, were twisting in and out and halting for brief intervals in a sort of general depot.

Finding the violet platform, which was unoccupied, he stepped aboard, and dropped into a little seat. Almost instantly, as if under intelligent guidance, it began to move, and Will was shot up through a sloping tunnel and out upon a sort of causeway in the Great Cavern, from which he looked down upon the mushroom buildings.

It was only a few minutes before he stopped at the palace of many-domed crystal, with the chameleon towers constantly changing in color; and there he was met by an attendant in a shimmering blue robe, who raised both hands in salute, according to a local custom, and then motioned him in through a small oblong doorway such as he had entered before.

ONLY a minute later, he was standing before the Timur—who, as Will now knew, was the legal ruler of all Le-Mur, a king with powers that were not, indeed, absolute, but were somewhat broader than those of the President of the United States.

Will was astonished to observe that he was being granted a private audience with this great dignitary; in fact, aside from four guards who stood, each with a long spear, at one corner of the room, he and the Timur were the only occupants of the great vaulted chamber.

As before, the sovereign was sitting cross-legged on a central platform; as before, he was impressive with his venerable appearance, white beard and shining white mantle.

For a moment, after Will's arrival, the Timur merely stood looking at him in a grave and troubled manner; and Will, trembling although he did his best to control himself, realized that some important announcement was in store, and that a crisis in his own life impended.

"Manu," the Timur at last said (this being an abberviation of "Man of the Upper Air"), "for ages all contact with your race has been prohibited. Primitives such as you Upper Air folk could only cause damage down here in Le-Mur. Through our earth-piercing radioscopes, we have been watching your doings for centuries; and what we have seen of your wars, revolutions and intrigues has not been such as to make us desire your closer acquaintance. In fact, I am empowered, by a special law, to consign any intruder from the Upper Air to the Obliteration Rooms—"

"Obliteration Rooms?" gasped Will, with a sinking sensation. "What on earth may they be?"

"The rooms where those who do not deserve life are pierced with the Paralyzing Needle, which brings oblivion. But have no fear, Manu. It is not for this that I have summoned you here. I believe that the Providence which governs us all has brought you down to us at the crucial moment, for you can be of great service to all Le-Mur. Do you wish to know how?"

The brows of the Timur were wrinkled with solemn lines as he spoke; his deep blue eyes narrowed thoughtfully with a look of sorrow in which there was at the same time a spark of hope.

"Are you willing to take chances, Manu? Are you ready to risk your life for the sake of Le-Mur?"

As if to punctuate these words, the spears of the four guardsmen came down with a sudden clattering. Then, for a few seconds, a silence that seemed almost leaden ensued.

"Risk my life, O Timur?" queried Will, thinking that perhaps he had not properly caught the meaning of the words. "How so? For what reason?"

"You, Manu, can do what no native of Le-Mur can accomplish. Let me explain."

NERVOUSLY the Timur uncrossed and then crossed his legs again as he tilted his lean body far forward on his platform of purple velvet.

"First I must tell you some things about our country, Manu. We threaten today to split into halves—and a land that splits into halves is like an egg with its shell broken. My followers and I have tried to give the people a good rule, and to govern kindly and reasonably. But I have a great enemy, Murkambu by name, who has been organizing half of the land against me, and today threatens not only my own reign, but the well being of all Le-Mur."

The Timur shook his head sadly, and continued,

"The trouble has been brewing for centuries, and is only now coming to a head. You see, Murkambu represents the Science Party; and my followers and I are Anti-Science. Not that we are against science, actually; only that we believe that scientific advances should be restrained, that new inventions should be put to use only when they will be of value to the people as a whole.

"As you know, our civilization is already highly mechanized. We have not only machines, but machines to run the machines—and everything is managed so efficiently that we are hard pressed to find two hours' work a day to occupy the average able-bodied citizen. Under these circumstances, we hold that further labor-saving devices are worse than useless."

"Looks that way to me, too," concurred Will.

"Ah! So then you agree with me! Good!" exclaimed the Timur, his eyes darting lively fires at his visitor. "Then you'll be so much the better for the secret assignment!"

"What secret assignment?" demanded Will, apprehensively.

"I'm coming to that, I'm coming to that," the ruler rattled on. "First let me tell you about Murkambu and his Science Party. They believe every new invention should be used to the full, no matter how many men it leaves unemployed and how it throws our life out of its orbit. Whether or not we can digest it, it should be thrown on the market!—as if a man should devour all the food he could lay hands on, even when his stomach was full! Of course, the explanation is that Murkambu and his group—hogs that they are!—are bent on nothing but their private profits."

"But if every one has all he wants anyhow, why should they care about private profits?"

The Timur threw up his hands in a despairing gesture.

"Why, indeed, Manu, except that men have the appetites of hungry dogs, no matter how they are fed? However, Science or Anti-Science—that is after all a political issue, and should be settled reasonably. But a reasonable settlement is the last thing Murkambu wants. He is—to do the devil justice—as brilliant a leader as Le-Mur has ever seen. Owing to his genius for organization, his oratorical talents, his wealth and his unscrupulousness, he has formed a powerful revolutionary party, a real threat against the government of

Le-Mur—in fact, it has already usurped hundreds of square miles of territory. The Science platform is, of course, only a rallying call, although it has added many wolves and vultures to the rebel ranks. But Murkambu's real desire is to overthrow the established order, to drive me from power, and to take control of the whole country!"

THE Timur tossed angrily on his purple platform as he spoke; his fists clenched and unclenched in nervous spasms. But there seemed to be no relevancy in his words as he went on, impulsively:

"So that is why—that is why, Manu, I have sent for you!"

"That is why you have sent for me?" repeated Will dully. "How so, O Timur?"

"It is like this," the ruler hastened. "Murkambu's faction is so powerful that I fear we may not be able to cope with it. Least of all, if it strikes suddenly—one of the 'terror-blows', which, I understand on the best authority, Murkambu has worked out in secret with his lieutenants. The stroke may be withheld indefinitely; or may fall at any time. That is, frankly, what worries me. If we could only learn the date of the impending outbreak, we would be in a better position to suppress it."

"But can you not learn, O Timur?"

The ruler sighed.

"Perhaps you can answer that for us, Manu. You see, we have already sent out many spies. But all were discovered by means of the Man Detector—which is very sensitive, and, as you know, reveals any human presence within several hundred yards. You, being from the Upper Air, are the only one who can get around this barrier—"

"But did the Man Detector not locate me the moment I entered your world, O Timur?"

A wan smile came to the sovereign's lips.

"That is not what I mean, Manu. Of course, your presence would be detected. But Murkambu and his Science men would have no reason to suspect you of being a government agent. You could claim to have escaped from us, and to be our enemy; and so could enter where none of us could go, and learn secrets hidden from our eyes. With skill and luck, you might even discover the intended date of the Revolution."

"So you wish me to be a spy, O Timur?"

"Call it what you will. But is it not for a noble purpose—to save our civilization from the plotters who scheme to wreck it?"

Will stared up at that tormented and yet benevolent face, marked with a patriarchal benignity; and had an instant conviction that the Timur had been speaking the truth, and did indeed represent the forces of light in their battle with evil.

"Do not let me coerce you, Manu," the voice went on, sorrowful and low. "I would not intimidate you, if I could—of what value to us would an agent be unless he went of his own free will?"

Over Will's mind there flashed a thought of the dangers involved; and his heart sank as he wondered how he could overcome the monstrous difficulties of maneuvering among strangers, a detective in an unknown world.

But the Timur had fixed him with a gaze that was imploring, almost magnetic. The two eyes fairly blazed with eagerness, with desire; and it seemed to Will that he could not bring to his tongue a protesting "No!" Besides, was there not some voice of adventure within him that cried out, "Yes, go, go!"

And so he heard himself replying, almost as if some automatic power within him had taken hold of his tongue:

"Tell me more, O Timur—more of what you would have me do."

The Timur leaned forward again; smiled and grunted an approving:

"Good! I could see you were no coward, Manu!" And somehow, at those words, Will knew that he was committed to the adventure.

CHAPTER IV

At the Enemy's Castle

MURKAMBU, known by his friends as "The Oracle" and "The Shining Leader" and by his enemies as "The Fury," sat behind a great steel-topped desk in the Hall of Science of his private mansion. All about him, along the walls of the enormous domed room, were tiny models of machines—curious devices of wheels, coils, rods, boilers, and web-like masses of wires corresponding to nothing ever seen in the world above. Engines shaped like butterflies, and others that looked like giant frogs, and still others that were bat-shaped or spider-limbed or mosquito-like, dangled from cables suspended from the ceiling, giving the place a little of the appearance of a museum of monsters and monstrosities.

Thoughtfully Murkambu stroked his square, cleft chin with a lean, nervous hand; brushed back the long, dyed black hair that fell untidily about his wide, low forehead; and, with his hawk eyes glittering keenly on either side of his hooked nose, stared at an attendant who, clad in the mud-yellow of the servant class, had just entered through the oblong door at the further end of the room.

"What is it, Gramm?" he demanded, as the servant raised one hand high above his head in token of respect.

"Leader," said Gramm, in oiled, deferential tones, "it is nothing much. Only a fugitive who claims to have escaped the Timur's clutches, and begs leave to throw himself at your feet."

Murkambu leaned far back among the cushions of his chair, smiled faintly, and asked, indifferently:

"Why must he see me? Will not one of the sub-Councillors serve?"

"But this is a different sort of fugitive, O Leader. Do you not remember hearing of the man who came months ago from the Upper Air—"

Murkambu shot forward in his seat with a start. His flashing eyes were all alertness as he broke in.

"Oh, so the man from the Upper Air has escaped and wishes to see me?"

"Yes, O Leader!"

"Show him in at once!"

While Gramm hastened out, Murkambu arose, and, with his hands folded behind his back, began slowly pacing along the aisle between two monster machines whose wide-open shark-like jaws had been painted a bloody red.

IT was little more than a minute, however, before Gramm returned, in company with a rail-thin six-footer, whose eyes blinked curiously from behind their tortoise-rimmed spectacles. His clothes—which were of a style never seen in Le-Mur before his arrival—were ragged and torn; his face was bristly with a several days' growth of beard.

"O Leader, I throw myself before you!" he said, using the local formula of respect, but speaking with a foreign accent that brought a dim smile to Murkambu's face.

"Be seated!" invited the latter, pointing to a mat on the floor, where the newcomer squatted cross-legged, while Murkambu returned to his cushioned chair, where he sat perched like an emperor.

"What is it that brings you here to see me, Manu?"

"O Leader, I was kept in confinement by my enemy, the Timur. Yesterday the prison door was left ajar by accident, and I slipped away. I stole through deep labyrinths for many miles, crawling through holes like a rat, lest I be re-captured. At last I came up near your palace, and having heard of you as a great and noble captain —"

"Who told you that?" inquired Murkambu, abruptly.

"I knew you must be, O Leader, since every one mentioned you as the enemy of my enemy, the Timur, against whom I have vowed vengeance for the sufferings he has caused me."

As he spoke, Will kept his eyes downcast toward the granite floor, seemingly in token of respect. He was remembering how he had rehearsed this very speech; how he had prepared it with the Timur himself; how he had purposely torn his clothes and bestrewn them with dirt and dust; how, with the Timur's aid, he had crept into an underground corridor leading toward Murkambu's palace; and how, emerging from this tunnel, he had inevitably been found by Murkambu's men, who had thus made the present interview possible.

"What is your object in seeing me, Manu?"

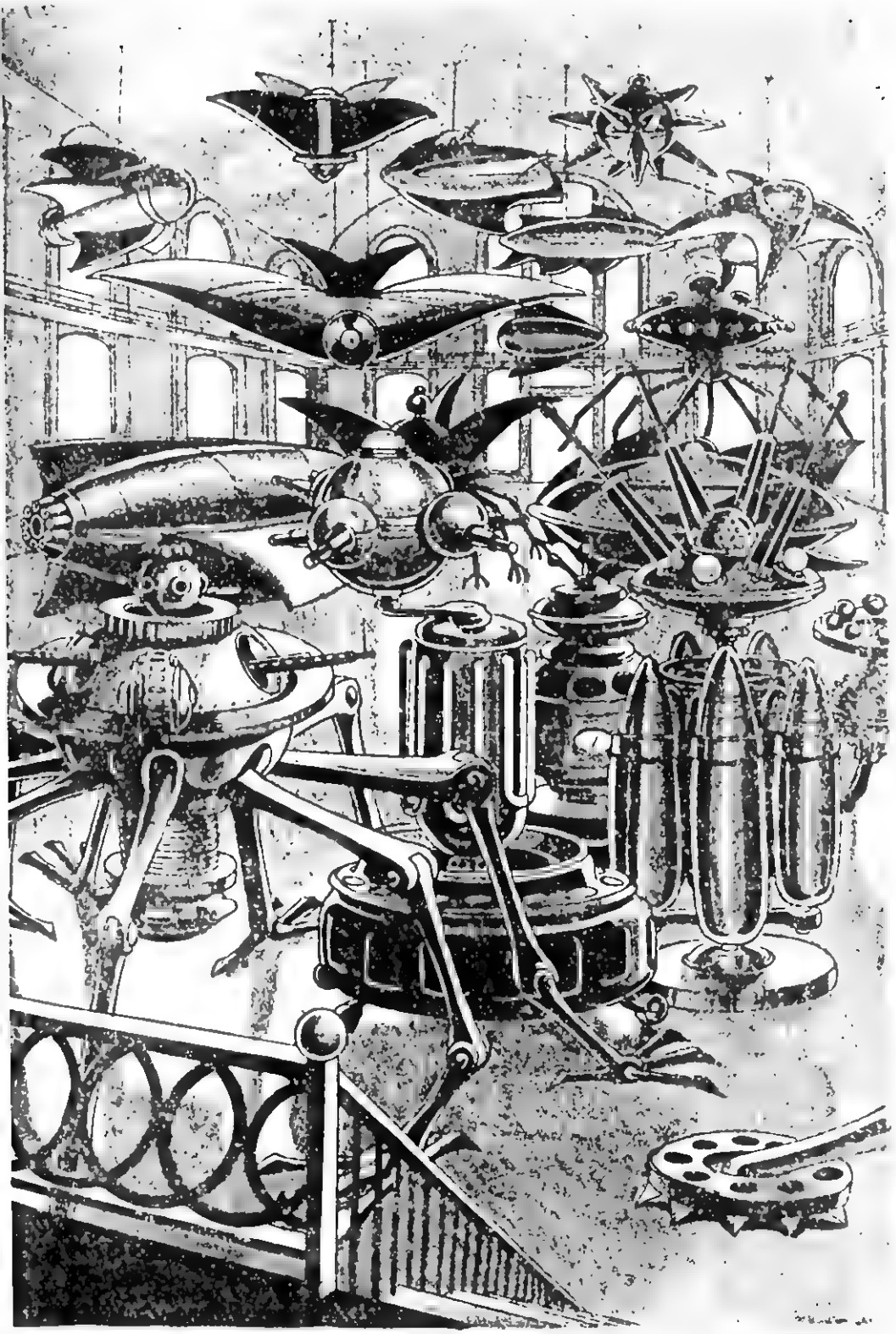
Cool, crisp, skeptical, the tones of Murkambu were not those of a man easily duped.

"Whom else should I see, O Leader? Who else could help me so well to avenge myself? I come to offer you my services. My life is at your disposal —and if anything I can do can help by so much as a hair's breadth to put down that tyrant—that devil—that—"

Awkwardly Will paused; for, with his limited Le-Murian vocabulary, he had run out of epithets by which to characterize the Timur.

But he beat his fist angrily in air, and bit his lip to emphasize his fury; and Murkambu, peering at him keenly, uttered a satisfied grunt, and declared:

"Good! I believe you, Manu! Why



There were many strange machines in Murkambu's Hall of Science

should you feel anything but rage at the Timur, after the reception he gave you? He is your enemy because he fears that you, with your knowledge of Upper Air inventions, might hurt the cause of Anti-Science. But we of the Science Party will know how to value you! We will welcome any secrets you may tell us of Upper Air inventions!"

"O Leader, I know little about inventions. But I will help as much as I can!"

"Then it is a promise, Manu!"

MURKAMBU spoke with an ominous rumbling. His hawk eyes were two black threatening fires that caused Will to shudder in spite of himself.

"Remember, then, it is a promise—and no man can break a promise to Murkambu and expect to live!"

"It is a promise, O Leader!"

"Then lift your left hand, Manu, and repeat these words after me. They are the oath of allegiance to the Science Party."

Will duly lifted his left hand, and mumbled several syllables after Murkambu; whereupon the leader, turning to Gramm, instructed:

"See that he is given suitable quarters, and dressed in the official Science uniform. After that, let him report to me for further instructions."

"It shall be as you say, O Leader," promised Gramm, saluting.

Will, as he turned to leave, could not see the sharp inquiring glance with which Murkambu's eyes followed him.

It is probable, in fact, that he would not have seen a mountain had it risen from the solid earth at that moment. For the oblong door ahead of him had opened, and a vision that caused his heart to flutter crazily had come gliding in.

For the first startled instant, he did not know if it were merely a ghost—merely the deluding creature of his own dreams. But it was more beautiful than any dream—here, in warm flesh and blood, was that superb creature who had brought him to Le-Mur!

No! there could be no doubt that it was *she*, with the big lustrous violet eyes beneath the pale auburn-crowned brow, the smile of beaming innocence, the fragrance and radiance that only the Chosen One can shed upon any man!

Will stopped short in his tracks at the sight; while she, casting him a glance of smiling curiosity and wonder, passed lightly on her way.

But he did not fail to notice what a deep obeisance Gramm made to her.

"Who may she be," he asked, as soon as he could regain control of himself, "a lady of high rank?"

"Of the very highest, Manu! May the gods bless her and preserve her! She is the youngest and favorite daughter of our leader, Murkambu."

At this information, Will staggered a little, and felt as if a bolt had hit him.

"Her name is Ilwanna," went on Gramm, who was evidently full of the subject. "Ilwanna, the Enchantress. She is known throughout Le-Mur as one of the fairest and wisest of our daughters. Although she is still very young, it is said that never have the fates given any woman a quicker, cleverer mind. In truth, Manu, she is so skilled in science that she has already made several extraordinary inventions."

"Is that—is that why they call her the Enchantress?"

"Yes, Manu, for that reason—and also because of her great beauty. Artists without number have thrown themselves down at her feet, begging to paint her—"

"And is she," demanded Will, rushing on to the question that concerned him most of all, "is she, by any chance —married?"

"She might be so many times over, Manu, if she accepted all the offers that are made her."

"But she has refused them all?"

"Thus far, Manu. Governors of provinces, statesmen and princes have thrown themselves down before her, but she has rejected all alike. She is wedded, she says, to Science."

Will groaned. If she had frowned on celebrities of her own race, what chance had he? What chance had he in any case, since she was the child of the very man he had been sent to spy upon?

Already he foresaw the dreadful dilemma that was to confront him: of loyalty to the Timur, to whom he had given his pledge, and who represented justice and right; or loyalty to the love that had brought him to Le-Mur. But how could it be that a girl so radiant, so unspoiled and apparently so innocent as Ilwanna could spring from so black a source as Murkambu?

THESE were the thoughts that occupied Will's mind during the next half hour, when Gramm led him into a long underground storage room and fitted him with the official Science uniform: an affair of black and white stripes, with a close-fitting sleeveless jacket and a sort of kilted skirt that ran only to the knees. The material, of a cobweb lightness and softness, was of the same synthetic substance as all the Le-Murian garments, combining the elasticity of rubber with the downiness of floss.

"Now we'll take you back before the Leader, Manu," said Gramm, surveying the results approvingly. "You're coming to look at last like a man!"

Murkambu echoed the same view a few minutes later, when he gazed at the striped figure who was ushered back before his desk. "It's strange what a difference clothes make in a man," he meditated. "Why, one would almost think you had been bred among civilized people, instead of in that barbarous Upper Air!"

And then, with a swift change of manner:

"Now to business, Manu! I don't mind confessing I've taken quite a fancy to you, and for that reason I'm appointing you one of the Councillors of the Science Party."

"Councillor of the Science Party?" demanded Will with a start. "How so?"

Gazing at those hawk eyes, which peered out from beneath the black untidy hair as if they would have liked to devour him, Will could hardly believe that here was a man who was favoring him out of mere personal sentiment.

"How so, Manu? Well, it is this way. You come from a land that has far surpassed our own in all the arts of savagery. Judging from what our instruments show of your world, we are mere infants when it comes to spreading fear, destruction and death. Our proposed 'terror-blow', which we hope to deliver against the Timur, would benefit greatly by your Upper Air expertness in atrocities. That is my chief reason for appointing you a Councillor, Manu."

"But what will my duties be, O Leader?"

"As a Councillor, you will have to inspect our secret preparations for the Revolution, and to suggest improvements, based on your Upper Air knowledge. Thus you may give us the advantage of brutalities beyond our wildest imagination. Thus, also, you

may reap revenge upon the Timur! Is it not so, O Manu?"

"It is so, O Leader!"

"Then go with Gramm, and he will lead you into the Annihilation Corridors, and the Fifth Basement, and the other pits where we prepare our attacks against the Timur. Look close and carefully, Manu! Do not hesitate at any suggestions. Remember—nothing is too terrible to try! Our motto is, 'To make our dreams come true, let us sow a crop of nightmares!' So out with your Upper Air bestialities! A man with your background will not disappoint us, Manu!"

"I am sure not, O Leader!"

"Then go! On the second day after tomorrow, I will expect you here to report! Now make haste! Look carefully! Think well! For if you show skill and wisdom, you may rise high in the Science Party!"

With an abrupt gesture, Murkambu waved Will and his attendant away. But the newly appointed Councillor, as he started off down the aisle amid the weird intricacy of machines, was torn between conflicting feelings. Here, in his official role with the Science Party, was an ideal opportunity to gain all the desired information for the Timur. But here also was the chance—if he were treacherous enough—to work his way up in the good graces of the Party, to earn the gratitude of Murkambu, and perhaps in the end, if all went well, even to win his way with Murkambu's daughter.

Muttering an oath, Will fought down this temptation. And, at the same time, he reached the end of the aisle; and, glancing back, received a faint shock. For was it true, or did he only imagine that the hawk eyes of Murkambu were following him with a gleam of amusement, and that the Leader chuckled beneath his breath?

CHAPTER V

Murkambu Weaves

WILL stood in a low-roofed basement which, smelling like a chemical laboratory, reached for hundreds of yards, its concrete roof supported by multitudes of steel columns. Along the floor, which was paved with granite, thousands of men were creeping on their hands and knees, or lay full-length, wriggling like snakes. Back and forth they twisted and squirmed in coordinated maneuvers, their lines looking like enormous pythons; while, as if to complete the reptilian impression, they gave out a low hissing sound as they moved, accompanied by a rustling as of lithe legless bodies gliding along the earth.

"This is our Rattlesnake Battalion, our Crawl Troopers," rang out the voice of Sub-Councillor Wincu of the Science Party, as he proudly took the new member on a tour of inspection. "It is our theory that, by creeping and sliding underfoot, these will take the enemy by surprise. They will move best in the darkness, protected by an Anti-Ray machine which will neutralize the Man Detector."

Shuddering, Will watched the maneuvers of these creeping squadrons; and recalled how, for days already, he had done nothing but observe Murkambu's preparations for the Revolution. Certainly, the arrangements were thorough! How would the Timur be able to defend himself? What defense would he have, for example, against the so-called Budding Bomb, which broke up into half a dozen scattering parts, each of which in turn scattered into six or eight more parts, before forty or fifty distinct explosions occurred? Or how would he be able to cope with the Electrolizing Ray, the heat of which caused the instant dis-

sociation of water into hydrogen and oxygen—a reaction which was reversed an instant later, when the two gases, with a devastating explosion, reunited to form water vapor? Again, how fight against the Hysterical Spray, which broke down the nervous systems of the victims, and caused them to go off into wild hysterical outbursts, from which the only release was in death?

"Diabolical! Simply diabolical! Guess the devil himself couldn't do much worse! Murkambu doesn't need any help from the Upper Air!" Will told himself, as he observed the various war machines. Was it not his duty to inform the Timur of these new weapons? Yes! Clearly, he must slip away to the ruler's palace at the first opportunity!

But this was more easily decided upon than accomplished. It seemed merely accidental, for he was apparently allowed every liberty; but whenever he started toward one of the exits leading into the Timur, a guard with a spear would be blocking the way; or else the entrance would be sealed, or surrounded with impassable pits. During the night (the eight-hour period when the lights were off) Will often thought of stealing away; but always the door of his little underground sleeping chamber would be locked—to guard him "against intrusion," he was told. However, he reassured himself with the thought, "I'll get away when the proper time comes," and, in growing horror, went on with his inspection of Murkambu's war machine.

SEVERAL times, during those days, he had caught sight of a figure that made him almost forget his duty to the Timur. Several times he had seen Murkambu's daughter, graciously smiling as ever, as she entered her father's home—a light, tripping, ethereal being, who seemed so wholly in keeping with this world of tinted, vari-colored palaces, so out of tune with the black designs brewing beneath the surface of those very palaces!

Was there not some way for him to speak with this delightful person, to make her acquaintance? At first he doubted it, for she would go drifting past as if he did not exist; and even when she glanced in his direction, her smile would seem to go right through him. Probably he was a mere cipher in her eyes, he reflected bitterly; he was in the position of a serf who courts the favor of a duchess!

But somehow—though the result might be his humiliation, or his lodgement in a dungeon — he must break down the barrier. He pondered long as to ways and means; but, the more he thought, the more entangled he became in schemes and counter-schemes. And then one day—quite by chance, as it seemed—the problem solved itself.

He had just left Murkambu's palace, after a brief interview with the Leader; and was strolling down a winding walk among pale green and blue fountains. As he turned the curve made by a clump of pansies as tall as a man and with blossoms as large as saucers, he heard light footsteps approaching; and his heart began to beat with a crazy pitter-patter as he came face to face with the very person he hoped and yet dreaded to meet.

He noticed that she smiled as she saw him, with a rippling, ingratiating smile that overspread her entire face; and was about to pass on when Will, feeling her to be not at all unfriendly, made a desperate effort to seize the opportunity.

"Ledala," he said (using a native expression of respect, corresponding to our "Madam"), "Ledala, one moment, please!"

She came to a halt, her violet eyes

widening with surprise.

"What is it, Runtub?" she asked this word being equivalent to our "Sir."

Will, confronted with this direct question, experienced the most embarrassing moment of his life. Imagine his position! he had stopped this lady, yet had nothing to say to her! He had merely the overwhelming sense that here was the object of his hopes, his thoughts, his dreams! Here was the one whom he had come so far and experienced such perils to meet! And now that he had met her at last, his mind refused to work; not an idea came to his brain, nor a sound to his lips, other than a half articulate muttering!

A SECOND or two that seemed endless went by. Will's stunned mind began to recover, and words were forming on his tongue, when he saw the amused smile that broke out on her face, heard her faint tittering, and knew that, in another moment, she would burst into outright laughter.

Then, indeed, he could have wished to sink into the earth! Then, indeed, he could have desired to be a thousand miles from Le-Mur! Yet, the next instant, with a resolute effort, he regained control of himself; overcame his bewilderment; and, though still embarrassed, spoke out of a stern inner necessity—out of the knowledge that, if he lost this opportunity, another would not speedily come.

"Ledala," he said, "you must pardon me. I come, as you know, from the Upper Air, and speak your language but poorly. And so it is sometimes hard to put my thoughts on my lips."

"That does not tell me why you wished to speak with me, Runtub," she returned, casting him an arch sidelong glance out of those flashing violet eyes.

Her tones, he thought, were as soft as music; each phrase had a rhythm that was like song in his ears.

"No, it does not tell you why I wished to speak with you, Ledala."

And then, as he asked himself what excuse to make, it came to him that no excuse was possible except the truth.

"Why should any one wish to speak with you, Ledala? Why, except that it brings pleasure? I should like to know you, Ledala—and if I am too bold, do not blame me too much. Say merely that it is because I am a barbarian from the Upper Air."

Her clear, silver-toned laughter showed that she was not at all offended, merely surprised—and more amused than ever.

"No, Runtub, I do not think you a barbarian, I have often wondered if the Upper Air could be more barbarous than Le-Mur. And I have wondered what it would be like to speak to an Upper Air man. So I am not sorry you have spoken. I have often seen you passing through my father's halls, and wanted to ask you a question, Runtub. What are those handsome bits of jewelry you wear over your eyes?"

"Bits of jewelry—over my eyes?" gasped Will, wondering if Ilwanna was trying to make fun of him. And reaching impulsively toward his forehead, he felt his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"What are they, Runtub? Nobody here has anything like them. They are such lovely decorations. I think they make a man look *so* attractive!"

AS Will observed the girl's approving smile, he felt grateful to nature for having made him near-sighted.

"Tell me, Runtub, something about your country," Ilwanna went on. "I have always wanted to know how it would feel to live in the Upper Air, with all those terrible open spaces above you —so huge that a person must feel lost! And that big light in the sky, which

you call the sun, and the little lights called stars—tell me all about them, Runtub!"

Will pointed down a little curving walk toward a patch of lawn between clouds of pink oleander flowers.

"Let us go there," he suggested, his heart beating fast at the unhoped-for opportunity. "Then I will tell you all —all you wish to know."

They squatted cross-legged on the grass, according to the local custom; and Will, seeing that flawless youthful face upturned in a glance of beaming inquiry, hardly knew how to begin. But somehow the words struggled to his lips, and he went on and on, and told of the earth above, its ships and its factories, its great cities and wide countrysides, its hills and rivers and mountains; and she listened fascinated, breaking in every now and then with:

"Oh, that must be glorious, Runtub!" or, "How I should like to see that with *my own eyes!*"

"Perhaps you will yet see that with your own eyes!" suggested Will; and already wild, impossible plans were forming in his mind. Now that he was face to face with her, and saw how the violet eyes sparkled with an ever-varying light beneath their long flickering lashes, he felt more hopelessly in love than ever, more completely her captive, more utterly chained to whatever part of the earth she might inhabit. Never, never, he thought, could he go back to his own land without her!

He did not know how long he remained with her; it seemed only a few minutes, but may actually have been an hour or two. With rare speed, their acquaintance ripened; having heard much about the Upper Air, she began to tell him many things he did not know about Le-Mur, as well as some things about herself, and how, having taken to science from her early teens, she had had the advantage of her father's laboratory, and had made experiments in chemistry at an age when most girls had no thought except for the cut of their dresses and the arrangement of their hair.

She was enchanted to learn that he too was a scientist, an inventor.

"Most of the men I meet in my father's home are old statesmen," she said. "And I hate statesmen, Runtub. They are like spiders — always weaving webs."

"Do not call me, Runtub," he urged. "My name is Will."

"Will? Will?" she repeated, smiling at the odd sound. "It has a pleasant ring on the tongue."

"And I will call you Ilwanna," he dared to suggest—when he saw her leap up with a start, her eyes widening in surprise, wonder, and alarm.

"What is it?" he demanded, as he too sprang to his feet. And then, turning, he saw.

FACING them with a smile that was almost Mephistophelian in its suavity, stood the girl's father, his hawk eyes flashing more keenly than ever, and his hooked nose seeming preternaturally long as it bent toward them like a beak. How many minutes he had been standing there, overhearing their talk, neither of them could say; but furious blushes came to the cheeks of them both, and they gaped and were wordless beneath his ironical scrutiny.

"Do not let me disturb you, my children," he said, in tones that were low, and surprisingly mild considering the outburst they had expected. "I hope you have been enjoying yourselves."

"I just came upon her by accident, O Leader," Will attempted to explain, still expecting a reprimand. "I was—asking her some questions—"

"It is well, Manu. You are a man,

are you not—and what man could resist my daughter's loveliness? As a matter of fact, I was about to introduce you, as I wish you to teach Ilwanna some of the Upper Air secrets. You will do that for me, will you not, Manu?"

"If you command it, O Leader, how can I refuse?"

"I do command it. Bless you, my children! Make good use of your time!"

Was it that there was just a faint note of sarcasm in his voice? Was it that there was something slightly sardonic in the twist he gave his black moustache, and in the wrinkling of his heavy cynical lips as he nodded, turned, and passed out of sight behind the clouds of oleander blossoms?

Such were the questions that Will and the girl silently asked as they faced one another again. A shadow had fallen between them; and though they tried to resume their conversation where they had left off, they could not regain their former cheerfulness.

CHAPTER VI

The Net Closes in

"I NEVER saw anything like it," said Gramm to his wife Ulu. "No, may I be dropped into the deepest pit and buried alive if I ever saw anything like the way this young Manu runs after Her Loftiness the Lady Ilwanna. By my head! If they are not always together!"

"Let the cavern roof drop upon me, if that is not disgraceful!" returned Ulu, with a sigh. "What is coming over our Leader? Of old, you know, the man who looked at Ilwanna out of the corner of one eye was as likely as not to end in the Obliteration Rooms!"

"True enough, wife! Yet did the Leader not give a reception for the Manu but a few days ago, and did the young upstart not openly, shamelessly pass most of his time with the Lady Ilwanna? Did I not come across the two of them but a day or two later, huddled side by side beneath a bamboo clump, whispering as though there was no one but the two of them in the whole world? Did I not see them this very morning, behind one of the columns beyond Murkambu's palace? And what were they doing? Looking into each other's eyes as if charmed, and holding hands? Did you ever hear of anything so shameful?"

"By the hem of our Leader's robe!" mourned Ulu. "What is the world coming to?"

This conversation only echoed what was coming to be common gossip. For, although it was only a few weeks since the Upper Air man and Ilwanna had met, they were seen everywhere together—which was a source of great surprise, since Murkambu was known to have been very particular about the company his daughter kept, and to have restricted her men friends to princes and high-ranking politicians. Could it be, people wondered, that he would permit the beauty who had refused so many titled hands to succumb to a mere nobody, a foreigner?

Will himself, amid the delirium of his love, scarcely asked such questions. It was enough for him that he could see Ilwanna almost as often as he pleased; enough for him that she seemed to reciprocate his affection! Surely, as they say, love is blind! Otherwise, he would have known that a naked sword was dangling above his head, would have realized that he was only being played with, as a cat plays with a mouse.

All too soon the bubble was to burst! And the blow, when it fell, was to descend with unexpected savagery.

He had not, it is true, forgotten his

pledge to the Timur; nor forgotten the threatened Revolution, which might wreck the life of Le-Mur. But as day after day went by, and no Revolution broke out, he was lulled into a false sense of security; and began to feel that perhaps after all, despite all Murkambu's preparations, there would be no actual outbreak.

"Another case," he thought, "of the barking dog that does not bite!" In the end, the Timur might not need his aid —and there might be no conflict between his duty to the ruler and his love for Murkambu's daughter!

Then rudely, in one moment, came the awakening. He had just come from a meeting with Ilwanna—a meeting in which, for the first time, he had taken her into his arms, had urged his love upon her, felt the responsive pressure of her arms, and heard her murmured promises of devotion. A man in the state in which he found himself after that meeting can hardly be said to be normal; his head whirled, his thoughts floated on clouds, he scarcely knew that there was a solid earth beneath his feet. And then, breaking into his ecstasy like a bombshell, came cruel realization.

He had received a summons, as many times before, from Sub-Councillor Wincu:

"See me at once!"

Making his way into the cavern-like room that was Wincu's headquarters, he was handed a slip of paper on which a few words were written in the up-and-down style of Le-Mur.

"Read and destroy," murmured Wincu.

He read:

"You are instructed to report at lightfall on the day after tomorrow at the tenth column to the right of these headquarters for R-day activities."

"R-day," as Will understood only too clearly, meant "day of the Revolution." The decisive blow against the Timur was less than forty-eight hours away!

IN a room of opalescent glass, whose shimmering pearly walls curved about them like an enormous bell, Murkambu sat face to face with his daughter. His expression was determined, bitter, angry, with just a suggestion of savagery in the way in which he bit into his lower lip; while the girl's cheeks were flushed, her lovely small lips drooped sullenly, and she shrank back on her cushion on the onyx floor, her violet eyes wide open with fear.

"What is that?" her father shot out at her, pushing his square jaw forward with a bulldog thrust. "You dare to defy me?"

"It is not that I defy you," she pleaded, withdrawing from him as far as possible. "It is only that—that I will not act like a traitor!"

"Traitor?" he echoed, giving the word an ironic ring. "Is it nothing, then, to play the traitor to *me?* Listen, my girl! Why do you suppose I have been throwing you in the way of this crawling rat from the Upper Air? Why do you suppose I have been making it easy for you to meet?—keeping you around the palace after he arrived, and using a thousand wiles so that you two might see one another? Was it that I wanted my daughter thrown away on such foreign trash? You know me better than that, Ilwanna! You knew very well I had my own ends to fulfill!"

"I knew nothing of the kind!" she flashed back, with spirit.

"From the beginning," went on Murkambu, his voice grown suave, in the manner of one who hides a dagger beneath every word, "did not my secret agents tell me all about him? Did I not know he was a spy?—a spy sent here by the Timur to ferret out my secrets? Was I deceived for one moment by the

perfidy in his heart?"

"I do not believe it!" denied Ilwanna, her tiny clenched fists indignantly shaking. "Will—that is, the Manu—is not perfidious!"

"No? Well, that is a matter for me to judge!" roared the Leader. "Do you think I could not have crushed him at any moment like a fly between my two hands? But why did I not do so? Not because I would have had any more compunction than about stepping on any other worm! No! Because it is bad policy to kill a man when he has valuable information that one may drag out of him!"

THE girl's breath came short and fast beneath the pressure of her terror; but she remained silent, staring at her persecutor.

"Being in the Timur's employ, has he not some of the secrets of his master? The secrets of defense—which my spies have not been able to fathom, because of the Man Detector? Then how can I find out what he knows? Not by direct questioning! Possibly not even by torture! But there is a simpler, softer way. And that is where you come in, Ilwanna. The charm and seductiveness of a woman—will they not extract that which scourges and dungeons are powerless to drag from a man?"

With an exclamation of anger, Ilwanna was on her feet. Her shapely head tossed proudly; her eyes were ablaze as she confronted her parent.

"Oh! So you wish me to act as a decoy to lure him for your ends?"

Murkambu too had arisen. But his manner was controlled, and his tones were quiet as he replied, with just the slightest suggestion of irony:

"Well, my lady, that is one way of putting it. In any case, he is now ripe for probing. I can see it in those silly glances he casts at you—ha, ha, as if you were the only thing in female shape that ever walked this earth! He got to the stage of imbecility even sooner than I expected. So now, Ilwanna, with just a little cleverness, you can learn what I want you to, and then bring me the information. It is little enough for your father to ask of you."

"I—I do not enjoy being used as a tool!" retorted Ilwanna. She was recalling how, from her earliest days, Murkambu had tried to make use of her for his own purposes: how he had employed her as a bait for his political rivals, whom he had permitted to court her, while drawing advantageous agreements out of them; how he had secretly betrothed her, in the face of her tearful protests, to the doddering old Baron Grimlok, before the would-be bridegroom had, fortunately for her, been removed by a stroke of apoplexy. She remembered how she had never, from childhood, had a word of fatherly affection from this redoubtable parent of hers, and how she had always feared him, and felt that he regarded her as but one of his many possessions.

And so her breast swelled indignantly, and a feeling that was near to hatred mingled with her dread as she stood there confronting him beneath the pearly walls of that bell-shaped room. But chiefly it was not for herself that she was angry and afraid.

"And what—what will you do with *him?*" she demanded.

"With him? What does one always do with spies? Do you think I would let him live in any case, after the advances he has made to my daughter?"

She compressed her lower lip, and made a resolute effort to keep back the tears.

"Why, it's—it's ungodly!" she at length forced out, with something like a sob.

"Not at all, my girl. Merely good

politics. Now will you go to him, like a loyal daughter of mine, and get me that information? If you refuse, well—you will not enjoy my locking you in the Black Tower for a month, as it has been my unfortunate duty to do once or twice before. Also, if you refuse—there will be no use prolonging the life of this earthworm from above. I will have him sent this very day to the Obliteration Rooms!"

"Oh, not this day!" she pleaded, almost in a wail. "Please give us time!"

"Then will you go to him, and get me that information? He is now in the sub-storage department, beneath the Violet Pavilion. If you will go out this way, my lady—"

With the greatest urbanity, Murkambu had reached toward the knob of a little oblong door.

"Just out this way. That's it. I knew you were a good daughter after all. You'll find it much more pleasant, really, than going to the Black Tower. Well, take your time. I'll give you till evening, when you'll find me in my study in the Hall of Science. But don't forget—I'll expect some really *valuable* information!"

Choking down a sob, Ilwanna turned and hastily went out.

WILL meanwhile was wrinkling up his brows and chewing at his lips as he restlessly paced the floor in the sub-storage department beneath the Violet Pavilion. Rarely had any man had to do battle with a more heartrending problem. Since R-day was at hand, it was clearly his duty to rush off and inform the Timur, so that he might take immediate steps to defend himself. Upon this might depend the well-being, the future of all Le-Mur! Yet to fulfill his pledge to the Timur would be to prove unfaithful to his love for Ilwanna.

How would she be able to forgive him for dashing off without a word to her? How forgive his treachery to her father? What explanation could he possibly offer that would make him appear anything better than a contemptible spy and traitor?

Compared to the warm reality of Ilwanna, how pale and unimportant the Timur and his cause now seemed! Yet never in his inmost heart did Will have any doubt of his course. He saw before him the Timur's patriarchal face, white-bearded and lined with trouble; contrasted it with the shrewd, cynical face of Murkambu; and knew in what direction his duty lay. Before his mind flashed the lines of a poet of centuries before, "I could not love thee, Dear, so much loved I not honor more"; and he knew that he too must follow the call of honor.

With a sigh, he started up the stairway into the Violet Pavilion. His senses were alert as a hunted beast's; while, trying to fight down the heaviness that weighed upon him like lead, he skirted a sentry-guarded door; veered aside from two spear-wielding guards who passed him with cold, suspicious glances; glided, without being seen, toward a trapdoor that he knew, and found it locked; and was about to hasten out of the Violet Pavilion when, startlingly, he came face to face with a familiar figure.

But her breathless manner, her pale countenance, her contorted cheeks and hurried gestures told him that here was a creature very different from the serene self-assured Ilwanna he had seen only a few hours before.

She did not take time for a formal greeting.

"Oh, thank the gods, it's you!" she exclaimed. And then, motioning him around a corner into a corridor of blue-veined marble where they could be by

themselves, she whispered:

"Hurry! Fly! There's not one moment to spare!"

He stared at her bewildered, in mute inquiry, while she went on, still in a whisper, but with the most eager urgency:

"Fly, I say! They'll be after us! We've not one second to waste!"

Glancing down into those big shining eyes that brimmed with tears, Will demanded:

"*We? We've* not one second to waste?"

"Yes, *we,*" she murmured; and her lips trembled, and he read the unutterable devotion in her gaze. "Make haste, make haste, my love. Whether we live or die, henceforth we will go together."

CHAPTER VII

Blow Follows Blow

THROUGH long underground passageways the lovers hurried, side by side. They descended and ascended stairways; slid down deep chutes; twisted through corkscrew tunnels; and crept into doorways so narrow that Will could barely force himself through.

"All Le-Mur is a labyrinth like this, beneath the main caverns," Ilwanna explained. "Fortunately, I know my way about."

By hasty snatches, she explained to him the nature of his peril; explained, also, her sudden decision to flee with him.

"I have often thought of flying from my father," she said. "Here in Le-Mur we women are supposed to have equal rights; but actually I was his puppet, which he pulled upon a string. Therefore I am doubly glad to go with you—to the Upper Air—anywhere, my beloved—"

"But first I must go to the Timur," Will confessed, gloomily. "How will you come with me, to your father's mortal enemy—"

"He is not *my* mortal enemy, is he? Besides, he need not know I am my father's daughter! I can disguise myself, can I not? Where do you think I am leading you now but to the home of my faithful old servant Sarpogu, who will take care of the change?"

A few minutes later, on the fifth level underground, they had entered a dingy ill-lighted den, where a wrinkled witch-like old woman threw her arms about Ilwanna.

"Bless you, little daughter!" she exclaimed. "Where do you come from? What are you all in such a flutter about? Why, I have known you since you were no bigger than my forearm, yet never did I see you so excited before!"

"Sarpogu was my nurse for years, after my poor mother died," Ilwanna announced. And then, turning to the old woman, she whispered something into her ear; after which the two of them retired together, and were gone about a quarter of an hour.

When they returned, Will started forward with a gasp. Ilwanna's shimmering cobweb robe had given place to the drab muddy yellow costume of the servant class. Her auburn hair had been dusted over with gray, until it seemed to belong to an old woman. Her pale, flawless cheeks had been stained with a dye which, even on close approach, gave the impression of the ruts and wrinkles of age. She stooped slightly as she walked; and her wide-open mouth showed several blackened, decayed-looking teeth which, only a few minutes before, had been faultlessly white.

Had it not been for the twinkling violet eyes, Will would scarcely have

known that this was Ilwanna at all!

"Good for you!" he greeted her. "You are a splendid little actress!"

"We will need all the acting we can do," she replied. And, turning, she thanked Sarpogu; received a small packet of condensed food from her hands; and urged, "Come, Will, let's be going."

EVERY minute, they knew, was precious. Perhaps by this time his absence, if not Ilwanna's, had been noticed; perhaps pursuers were already on their trail.

"Not until we are near the Timur's palace will we be safe," she whispered to him. "But come! I know every secret passageway!"

Crawling through a dimly lighted gallery that twisted like a serpent, she led him toward a large triangular gateway.

"Once we have passed this," she said, "we will be under the protection of the Timur's soldiers." But, as they drew near, there came an ominous clanking; long spear-pointed bars drew down—and the path was blocked as solidly as by a row of bayonets.

Retreating, they tried another gallery; and this time, instead of the bristling bars, a heavy chain blocked their passage. On a third occasion, a barbed wire meshwork suddenly faced them; and, on the fourth attempt, a shower of arrows shot up from the earth, one of them almost impaling Will.

It was now only too clear that every path would be blocked. The floor of every gallery was planted with one of the so-called "electric mines" which automatically, at the lightest footfall, set up an impassable barrier.

Even as this realization came to them, Ilwanna drew from the inner folds of her garments a little black device no larger than a marble, which she thrust into one of her ears. Then, bending down to the gallery floor, she listened for several minutes.

Resuming an upright posture, she looked solemn, and more frightened than Will had yet seen her. Her disguise could not conceal the trembling of her hands, nor wholly hide the unusual pallor that had overspread her face. Nor could it keep her voice from faltering as she announced:

"It is as I feared. I hear the tramp of marching columns."

"But how? How can you hear them?"

"Listen yourself, beloved!"

She gave him the black marble-sized object; and, putting it in one of his ears, he bent down as she had done.

Surely enough, a low, muffled tramp, tramp, tramp came to his ears!

"It is the Magnetic Sound Amplifier, which I myself invented," she declared. "It attracts the waves of sound vibrating through the earth, and magnifies them more than a million times."

But Will was not interested just then in scientific explanations.

"What is the meaning," he gasped, "of the marching columns?"

She cast him a glance which made the answer only too evident.

"Our escape has been noticed," was all she said.

But how avoid the approaching enemy? Obviously, no ordinary hideout would help them; for the Man Detector, with its remorseless rays, would uncover them more surely than would a pack of bloodhounds.

"There is just one last hope," Ilwanna decided, slowly and reflectively. "On the eleventh layer underground—the lowest level—there is an old gallery which has not been used for years, having been condemned as unsafe. It may be that this has been overlooked,

and is still barely passable. If you are willing to take the chance—"

"For myself—of course I am willing. But why must you run the risk?"

"Where you go, I go! Come, while we stand here debating, we may both be caught!"

AS if to testify to the truth of this assertion, the gallery roof trembled slightly.

"The troops—the troops march just above!" whispered Ilwanna; and, not daring to utter another word, she led the way downward.

They groped through a tunnel so steep that they had great difficulty in keeping their balance; and, after long loopings and windings, came to a circle of darkness resembling the entrance to a coal cellar.

"Surely enough, it *has* been forgotten!" exclaimed the girl, exultantly. "There is not one light burning!"

In Will's eyes, the pitch-black entrance looked far from inviting. But he gritted his teeth; choked down his misgivings; murmured, "Good, let's go on!"; and took out one of the flashlights that he had brought from the Upper Air (the other having been left at his headquarters at the Timur's, for use in emergencies).

Leading the way, he pushed forward foot by foot. The tunnel was so narrow that two persons could not move side by side; it twisted as sinuously as a coiled wire; it was filled with noisome odors, as of a long-closed basement; and was hot as a desert day, since the refrigeration system did not apply here.

Puffing, panting and sweating, Will had a sense of imprisonment, which only grew as he pressed on; a sense of impending catastrophe, which he could not shake off. Several times, turning to Ilwanna, he begged her to go back, in order to spare herself the torment and peril; but always her laughter rang out, clear and reassuring.

"And where is there that you can go, beloved, and I cannot follow?"

At last they came to a point so narrow that they doubted the possibility of further penetration.

"Better let me go ahead just a little to explore," suggested Will, and forced his way forward a few yards. It was strange that his premonition of disaster, so active until now, was slumbering at this very moment when it should have been most awake!

"Wait, I'm coming too!" he heard Ilwanna crying. But almost before her weirdly echoing tones had died down, they were drowned by another sound, a sudden thundering and crashing, accompanied by such a shaking of the earth that Will was thrown off his feet. For several seconds the commotion continued, then subsided to a crunching and grating that rapidly faded out. But what was that scream which Will had heard or thought he had heard at the height of the tumult?

More startled and bewildered than hurt, he picked himself up; observed with a shock that everything about him had gone black; and, reaching automatically for his flashlight, found that the lens and light-bulb had been shattered as he fell.

"Ilwanna!" he cried, in terror for her sake. "Ilwanna! Ilwanna!"

AS from an enormous distance, her voice came to him:

"Here I am, beloved! I am not hurt! But you—are you safe?"

"I am safe!" he shouted back. "Wait there for me! I am coming!"

Even as he started toward her, a sharp obstacle imposed itself in his way. His hands, groping in the darkness, felt a hard, irregular shape, as of

a boulder. And above this shape he felt others, of huge size, the whole forming a massive barricade.

"Be careful, beloved, lest you displace other rocks!" he heard Ilwanna's voice coming to him in a wail. "They have had rock slides before—that is why they called this gallery unsafe. The pressure of your weight as you passed it was enough to make the roof fall!"

"Thank God, the rocks missed us both!" he exclaimed.

"Thank God, there is an open space between, so that we may talk!"

"But who are we to thank," he groaned, "that we're on opposite sides of this infernal rock-fall? Maybe, if I try, I can clear some of these stones away—"

"No, no, by the Timur's beard, don't!" she warned, in a voice shrill with alarm. "That might start another slide!"

"But how the deuce can we get out now?" he mourned. His head, reeling in that hot, devitalized air, was unable to do battle with the problem. Were they both to perish there in that foul tunnel?

"What does it matter if we die, so long as we die together?" he heard her say, as if in echo of his thoughts.

Then, before he could attempt an answer, he was startled by a sound from the far distance. Thud, thud, thud! with a dull monotonous insistency, gradually growing louder, until it seemed as if he could hear the crashing and pounding of his approaching doom!

"What is it?" he gasped. "What can it be?"

But the answer was already on Ilwanna's lips.

"The troops! I should have known it! The troops have heard the rock-slide! They're coming to investigate!"

Surely enough, vague shadows began to move from far down the gallery. Looking through a crevice between two fallen rocks—a crevice only a few inches across—he could see the wavering reflections. As yet the light-bearers were hidden around a turn in the corridor; but the green rays of their lanterns, flickering dimly through the tunnel walls, were more terrifying than a visible menace.

"Be of good heart, beloved. It is only the troops approaching," Ilwanna consoled him; but the tones of her voice betrayed that she was shuddering.

THUD, thud, thud, the noise grew louder and more ominous. Then suddenly, around a turn in the corridor, a tall figure swept, a dull green radium lantern burning in one hand, the keen steel of a spearpoint glittering above his right shoulder. Behind him, in close succession, others followed, although to Will's eyes they were as a mere troop of shadows, of ghosts.

"Ah," the leader exclaimed, his eyes falling upon Ilwanna, who, in her disguise, he could not recognize. "What dog of a spy have we here? Come, you dirty wretch, out with you!"

With a wrench, the newcomer had jerked Ilwanna forward by the arm. And Will, observing this act and hearing her murmur of protest, felt a savage desire to leap to her aid. Oh, could he only have burst through the rock wall! But was any lover ever in a more cruel position? Powerless to lift a finger to help her, he saw her lashed about with ropes; heard her cry out in shrill indignation; heard the mocking laughter of her captors; and heard one of the men exclaim:

"Away with her! We will bring her to our good master Murkambu, who makes short shrift of spies!"

"Oh, not to Murkambu!" the victim protested, terrified. "Do not take me to Murkambu!"

Her captors only laughed; while Will, clutching at the rocks in his rage, called out a challenge:

"Hurt one hair of her head, and, devil take you, I'll—"

"Oh, so there's another!" shouted one of the soldiers, aware for the first time of Will's presence. "By the lamp of my eyes! Another spy! Let us take him too!"

With an eager thrust, the man started forward. But, even as he did so, the unexpected once more intervened. There came another roaring in Will's ears, the rumble of walls collapsing, the crash and thunder of falling rocks; and Will, knocked to the earth by the force of the upheaval, was momentarily stunned.

Recovering himself with an effort, he realized that the fissure in the rocks had been sealed. Everything about him was dark and silent as death; and there was no answer when he beat his fists against the rocks, and called out, in choking, sobbing notes:

"Ilwanna! Ilwanna! Answer me, Ilwanna! Answer! Ilwanna, Ilwanna, are you still alive?"

CHAPTER VIII

The Hour Strikes

SLOWLY, blindly, like a man in a bad dream, Will began groping his way down the black tunnel. He had no further hope of any response from Ilwanna; the second rock-slide had evidently done its work all too well!

"God! Why didn't it catch me, too!" Will muttered to himself, in his despondency; but, remembering his duty to the Timur, he knew that he had no choice but to go on and seek to extricate himself.

This task, however, seemed hopeless. He did not know for how many hours he wandered back and forth sagging with the heat, half delirious with thirst, his tongue hanging out like an exhausted dog's, his head aching, his eyes useless in that impenetrable darkness. He knocked his head against jutting walls, stubbed his toes, bruised his shins and elbows; he tripped, and recovered himself; he sat for brief intervals on the rutted floor to rest, then arose and crept or stumbled on his way.

It was not long before he realized that he was lost. The tunnel branched in several places; he chose his course at random, and had to make blind guesses. Several times, when the gallery led sharply downward, he retraced his path; once he slipped down a ten-foot descent, and, torn and scratched, was unable to make his way back. And finally, near to fainting, he flung himself full length on the floor, his breath coming hard, his head swimming, his skin burning hot; while his fevered mind formed visions of how, perhaps for ages, his bones would lie here in this blank depth, unburied, undiscovered, until at last the cavern roof fell in above them.

But again he arose and struggled on, stumbling and creeping, more often on all fours than erect. It seemed that an epoch of torment went by before, long afterward, he was aware of a dim light shining somewhere ahead.

He approached it; it appeared far away, appeared to retreat as he advanced; he felt that he had not the strength to reach it. But gradually the light brightened; and there came a moment when, at a turn in the tunnel, he found himself approaching the entrance of an illuminated gallery, where a cool breath showed that he was returning to the air-conditioned regions.

It was there that, an hour or two

later, a company of armed scouts found him as they made their regular rounds. He lay unconscious, apparently lifeless, and it was long before they could revive him. Even after his eyes opened and the power of speech came back to him, he looked about him doubtfully and with fear.

"Who are you? Murkambu's men?" he mumbled, wondering if he had endured so much merely in order to fall into the power of his enemy.

But at the mention of Murkambu, the leader of the scouts spat out in disgust.

"No! by our honor! We are loyal troops of His Loftiness the Timur!"

"Thank God!" sighed Will, and sank back into unconsciousness.

MANY hours more had passed before he was in a condition to see the ruler. Then, rested and fed, and with his soiled and gashed clothes replaced by a clean, fresh robe, he was led back to the edifice of many-domed crystal where the Timur held court.

To his surprise, a great change had overcome the whole region. Enormous walls of rock had been thrown up, in some places completely hiding the bubble palaces. Black screens had been erected in front of the mushroom temples; a meshwork of deep trenches threaded the earth; heavy wire entanglements marked "Keep off!" lined the walks among the fountains and flowers. And everywhere were brusque, black-clad men carrying spears and long, gray, steel machines of about the size and shape of a baseball bat.

"What in blazes has come over the place?" Will wondered. But he was not to be long in finding out.

Once again he was led through a little oblong doorway into the crystalline palace; down a long arched corridor that glowed with translucent rose and gold; and into a great vaulted chamber where dozens of men in long flowing robes were squatted cross-legged on the floor.

In the center, also cross-legged, the Timur sat upon his platform of purple velvet. But it seemed to Will that he looked years older; his back, previously erect in spite of his years, now seemed stooped beneath an invisible weight; and his face appeared thinner and more lined.

Upon seeing Will, who reached down and touched the floor three times with his left hand in the prescribed ceremony of respect, the Timur motioned to the assembled company in a gesture of dismissal; and, after they were gone, turned to Will, and inquired, in a sad and weary voice:

"Well, Manu, what have you found?"

As briefly as possible, Will reported what he knew of Murkambu's preparations.

"He plans to strike the great blow immediately!" he ended breathlessly. "Less than forty-eight hours from when I left—and I do not know how much time has passed."

In such excitement did the Timur lean forward that Will thought he was about to fall off his pedestal.

"What's that?" he demanded. "By my robe, Manu! just what did you hear?"

Will mentioned the day and hour, according to the local way of reckoning time. And, at this announcement, the Timur's blue eyes seemed ready to pop out of his head. He gave a still more agitated start, twisted about on his purple platform, and exclaimed, in a long-drawn voice of despair:

"Why, that gives us only one hour more!"

PARALYZED by the blow, the ruler seemed unable to warm himself into action.

"I knew it would happen!" he muttered into his beard. "I knew it! Haven't I been taking defense measures? Haven't I been building electric barricades, to smite the enemy with the sting of death? And Ray Screens, to ward off the poison Infra-Red light beams? And Boomerang Nets, to catch and hurl back the enemy's projectiles? Haven't I ruined our beautiful land? What will be left of it all when the attack is over?"

"Come, you must rouse yourself—take action, Your Loftiness! At once!"

"Take action, Manu? But how? From what direction will the attack come? Against what should I defend myself? Murkambu will strike in the dark, with secret new weapons. I have not the forces to defend myself—no, in spite of all my preparations! I have not the forces, Manu! Not unless I make use of secret new weapons!"

"What secret new weapons have you, Your Loftiness?"

The Timur thought for a moment, and his face appeared graver than ever.

"Nothing that is not too terrible to use. No, nothing not too terrible to use, Manu. Locked up in my private vaults, there are—"

Interrupting him in mid-sentence, a uniformed man dashed in through the rear door. Dishevelled, panting, red-faced, he entered without formality; pressed forward, half reeling, to the Timur's pedestal; and, without taking time to prostrate himself or salute, burst out, in a broken voice:

"Your Loftiness—Your Loftiness—"

"What is it, Eru?" demanded the ruler, his twitching fingers eloquent of his concern.

"Your Loftiness," rushed on the newcomer, gasping. "Your Loftiness—tidings for you!"

"What tidings?"

"Murkambu's men — his Crawl Troopers—they have stormed us on the Seventh Layer. They have broke—have broken through our first Column of Defense!"

All too clearly Will remembered the troops he had seen crawling and squirming in a great serpentine.

"They have wound their way in snake-like," went on Eru, with a wail. "Crushed our advance guard with a rattlesnake twist! Many of our men are in flight, O Leader! There seems no way to beat the enemy back."

The Timur groaned. In tones so low and rapid that Will could not follow the words, he snapped out a series of orders. Then, coming down from his pedestal and taking up a pronged staff, he started in stately dignity across the room.

"The hour is come," he said, "when we must give our all for LeMur and be ready to die in order that right may live."

CHAPTER IX

The Crawl Troopers Advance

OUT of a thousand tunnels, which appeared at sudden unexpected places in the earth, the black-and-white striped troops of the Science Party were pouring. They shot from the ground in little buzzing machines, which leapt forward like grasshoppers; they crawled down from the roof of the Great Cavern, and swung themselves to the floor on spider-like cables; they squirmed in their serpent columns around the buildings and over the rock-piles; they pointed their weapons, shaped like baseball bats; and let out showers of blue sparks, which immunized the electrical defenses. Barricades crumbled before them like paper; while thousands of citizens fled shouting and screaming, jostling one another as they dived into deep pits for safety; or falling head-

long with mortal shrieks as they were pierced by the flame-red bolts launched by the invaders.

Meanwhile, in a small closed compartment five layers underground, the Timur sat with a small corps of his advisers. Through a combination radio and television machine, he had been following the invasion; and his eyes were moist as he watched the rapid advance of Murkambu's followers.

"I knew we were not prepared," he mourned, "but I never suspected the enemy could take us so by storm."

"O Timur," said Will, who stood at his side, "what of the secret weapons you said you had?"

The Timur sighed.

"Never did I suppose I would descend to using them. They are savage enough, Manu, to be worthy of the Upper Air!"

"Yet you are going to use them?"

"I myself have this day persuaded him," declared General Massupu, a bulldog-faced figure who stood to the ruler's right. "His Loftiness was very reluctant, but I have convinced him that the end justifies the means."

"I fear that the end will be ruin!" mourned the Timur.

"The end will be victory!" dissented Massupu. "Wait, and see! In only a few minutes now, the new inventions will be in operation. We will witness the results through the Sound-Sight Relayer."

With a confident gesture, the General pointed to a great chest-like case, from which scores of rubber tubes emerged, in masses like a Gorgon's hair. This, Will knew, was the radio-television machine; by adjusting the appropriate tubes to eyes and ears, every person in the room might be a long-range spectator of the battle.

"Yes, the new inventions will save us!" Massupu went on, with smiling assurance. And, indeed, it soon began to look as if he spoke the truth! For Will, by means of the "Sound-Sight Relayer," gazed upon a strangely altered battlefield.

FIRST he observed the bubble palaces, the mushroom temples, with the invading columns winding among them in their thick serpent-like masses. Then suddenly, out of the earth, iron snouts several feet across emerged, looking a little like the heads of gigantic metal drills. And from each of these machines, almost instantly, there uprose a gleaming muzzle, like a huge rapid-fire gun, which shot a long white streak, apparently of solid matter, to the accompaniment of a roaring which, in spite of the dimming effects of the machine, was almost too much for the listener's ears. Each streak struck one of the columns of men, which melted away before it like ants before a hurricane; each, swerving to right and left, obliterated whole battalions.

Deadly tanks that bored up from within the earth!

But they did not stop with the destruction of the men. One bored its way like a series of sixteen-inch shells through the buildings, which collapsed one after one, to the accompaniment of a Titanic crashing and thundering. And in places, where a white streak struck the ground, the solid rock seemed to dissolve before it, while great steamy clouds arose and hid the wreckage.

Then, when by degrees the mists cleared away and the white streaks had vanished, Will could see only the broken steel bones of towers, the glitter of shattered glass, the jumbles of stone and steel where the exquisite courts and temples had stood. All were drenched as by a flood; great pools of water stood all about; and muddy streams flowed in all directions.

Will did not need to be told what had caused the devastation. It had all been done by the power of water! Hydraulic spouts, under such pressure as to release the liquid with a bullet's speed, were as savage destroyers as solid projectiles. The principle was already familiar in the Upper Air, in hydraulic mining that tore down whole mountainsides—the Le-Murian weapons merely represented an extension of the same idea!

"By my beard," mourned the Timur, as he staggered away from the Sound-Sight Relayer, "at the rate we're tearing things up, we won't be much better off if we win than if we lose!"

"Quite the contrary, Your Loftiness!" enthused General Massupu. "Why, it gives me a sense of artistic satisfaction, the way we wiped the enemy out. But wait! We haven't finished yet! The other inventions are still more wonderful!"

TURNING back to the Sight-Sound Relayer, Will saw something that looked like a gigantic flaming eagle launched into air from a hidden tube. It floated through space, midway to the roof of the Great Cavern, and gave off crimson sparks as it advanced; while following it by adjusting the instrument as it moved toward Murkambu's domains, Will saw how it swooped with orange-red drooping talons upon a great domed building. For an instant it hovered above the roof, as if held back by some conscious reluctance; then fell —and, in a sudden scarlet puff, the building was gone.

"Well, what do you think of our eagle torpedo?" General Massupu demanded. "Ought to cost the enemy a good deal before we're done, don't you think?"

But Will, as he observed the debris of the once-proud edifice, felt a regret that he could not wholly account for, as at the death of something rare and priceless. Was it that the thought of Ilwanna was in his mind? That he knew that she, if alive, would be in just such a place as the eagle torpedo had destroyed? But no! She had been crushed in the rock-slide! It could make no difference to her what bombs were launched or what buildings wrecked!

"The principle of the torpedo is really very simple," he heard Massupu explaining, jubilantly. "Buoyed up in an envelope of hydrogen, it can travel forty or fifty miles through the air with its cargo of deadly explosives. Then, when it strikes, the hydrogen, igniting, will make the explosion all the more destructive. But look at *this* weapon!"

Once more Will's eyes and ears were fastened on the Sight-Sound Relayer, and noted a scene that was spectacular if not beautiful. Through the air, high up toward the roof of the Great Cavern, long colored filaments were moving. Ribbon-like and wavy, they extended in lines of orange and vermilion, indigo and lemon, emerald, sapphire and ruby, which bent and twisted like colossal sky-serpents and rapidly moved westward toward Murkambu's headquarters.

At first they seemed so much like the parts of some harmless and fantastic exhibition that it was hard to believe them the agents of death. But Will, observing them as they came to earth with swift and sinuous windings after traveling for miles, saw how every man and woman within many yards fell as if struck by a bullet, quivered for a moment, and then lay still.

"These are the Sky Serpents," stated General Massupu. "They are composed of poison gasses, which loop and squirm so horribly that once we have launched them they are out of control, and neither we or the enemy can tell where they are to descend."

"You believe these inventions can win the war?" asked Will.

General Massupu nodded.

"Murkambu will have no chance. Within a few weeks the Science Party will be defeated by science."

THE events of the next several days did, indeed, seem to bear out this prediction. With the introduction of the secret weapons, a sharp turn in the tide of battle was noted. Will, listening and watching beside the Timur and his advisers, heard the jubilation as the invasion was thrown back mile after mile; as Murkambu's crawl-troopers were scattered or chased into the depths of the earth; as all the Science warriors were cleared out of the districts they had overrun; and the Timur's forces prepared to take the offensive in the territory still under rebel control.

"This will be the end of Murkambu!" predicted General Massupu, as he exultantly followed the various engagements through the Sight-Sound Relayer.

Will, convinced of the truth of this forecast, now began to think of returning to the Upper Air. A deep, unceasing melancholy had possessed him ever since the loss of Ilwanna; he knew that he could never find peace without her here in Le-Mur. On the other hand, how could he return to his own land until he knew beyond any question what had happened to her? Even though he had ceased to hope, he must have positive information as to her fate! And for that he must wait until the war was over and he could again enter her father's territory.

But meanwhile strange and disastrous events were to intervene.

One day, upon descending to the Timur's underground retreat, Will found the ruler looking particularly depressed. Little blue hollows had formed beneath his eyes; his long, sagacious face drooped, and his cheeks were criss-crossed with downturning grooves. He hardly acknowledged Will's salute; but, gazing straight ahead with a sad, fixed stare, remarked:

"It is just as I thought, Manu. The new weapons are of no use after all."

"Of no use, O Timur? But have they not driven the enemy back?"

"Yes, for a while, Manu. But there is an old saying of our people: 'The tricks taught to the right hand can be learned by the left.' Look through the Sound-Sight Relayer—and you will see!"

Will did as directed; and saw the black-and-white striped columns of Murkambu advancing in a long serpentine across a plain littered with heaped and broken masonry. Out of great spouts, aiding their advance, poured white devastating streams of molten metal; above them, gigantic torpedoes floated through the air toward the enemy; while flashing streaks of lightning reached out in long banners.

"Good God!" Will exclaimed. "They've improved on our inventions!"

"Exactly!" groaned the Timur. "Which means we're as badly off as ever. They've already taken back most of the land we recaptured from them. What's more, we don't seem able to stop their advance. They also have a wholly new weapon—and it's more terrible than any of ours."

WILL, peering and listening through the instrument, was aware of a prodigious apparition just rising above a little ridge of ground. Shaped like a tiger, with great black and tawny stripes, it seemed larger than an elephant as it came springing forward in a series of stupendous bounds. From its wide-open red mouth, a purple vapor fumed; its claws, slashing at the ground whenever

they touched it, left gashes many feet wide. Its eyes were yellow blazes so bright that Will could hardly bear to look; and from its throat there issued a bellowing as of an infuriated bull.

Appalled, and not quite sure whether it were an actual beast, Will watched the monster approach. Then all at once, with such force that it caused the very instrument to tremble, the giant flew apart—scattered into hundreds of fragments, each of which burst with loud detonations and showers of crimson sparks. It was several minutes before the upheaval had subsided; and, when all was quiet again, the earth over hundreds of acres was turned up as by a titanic plow.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed the watcher. "That *is* worse than any of our weapons."

"You don't know the most terrible part of it, either," the Timur announced, with a sigh. "The gases released by the explosions have a peculiar effect. Every one who inhales them suffers a peculiar lassitude, which may wear off in a few days, but leaves the victim without will power for a time. Or, rather, I should say the will is paralyzed, through some strange action of the gas upon the nervous system. Thus thousands of our troops, from the Generals down, have been left without the desire to fight, and have been taken prisoners without resistance."

"But can't we imitate this invention?"

"By the time our chemists would be able to analyze and copy it," groaned the Timur, "there will be nothing left of us! No, I'm afraid, Manu, we're at the end of our resources."

Will reflected for a moment. And, as he did so, an idea shot into his head —an idea so striking, and yet so simple, that he wondered why it had never occurred to him before.

"O Timur," he said, turning to the sovereign with a confident smile, "I believe I have a way of throwing back Murkambu and his hordes."

CHAPTER X

Blue Nitrolene

SOLEMNLY, questioningly the Timur sat staring at Will. His blue eyes were grave with thought; his brows were wrinkled; doubt and perplexity were written in his manner.

"That is a wonderful invention, O Manu, if it is all that you claim. What do you call it?"

"Blue Nitrolene, O Timur. I have experimented upon it for years, and believe it the most deadly weapon ever invented, though the government of my own country would not buy it from me."

"I can well understand that, Manu. If it is all that you say, it is too terrible to be entrusted in human hands. For grown men are but infants when one gives them the tools to destroy. What did you say the principle of this Blue Nitrolene is?"

Will explained how the chemical, a compound of nitrogen, carbon, sulphur and phosphorus, acted as an atomic catalyzer, breaking up the heavier and more complex elements to form the simpler, and consequently causing solid matter to disappear amid a stupendous release of energy.

"Have you the formula with you?" questioned the Timur.

"No, but have I not worked at it for years, making the substance time after time, so that I know every detail of the process by heart. I know your laboratories, Loftiness, are well equipped. I will have no trouble in showing your chemists how to make Blue Nitrolene. It shall not take long—within twenty-

four hours, I promise you, you shall have a supply!"

"And what is to prevent the enemy from copying it, Manu? So that we all will be worse off in the end?"

"Before the enemy can study it, they will be defeated, O Timur."

"Then has this invention ever been tried in warfare?"

"Never, Your Loftiness. Yet I know what it will accomplish."

"And even if we win, Manu, this weapon will remain in Le-Mur, waiting to be seized by some new rebel leader, who will use it to blow the country to bits. No, Manu! A deadly invention may be worse than any human enemy."

Argue as he would, Will could not convince the Timur. Precisely because the weapon promised to be so effective, the ruler refused to employ it!

And, indeed, except for an unforeseen event, it probably never would have been employed.

A FEW hours later, a conference of the Timur's advisers had gathered in his little underground retreat. General Massupu had just finished a long address, in which he declared that, at the rate Murkambu was advancing, the defending forces could not hold out for another forty-eight hours.

No sooner had he sat down than a tremor, as of an earthquake, was felt. Almost instantly, it was followed by a severer tremor, so violent that all the occupants of the room were flung about like dice in a box. And while they cried out in terror and a third tremor rocked the room, an enormous bulge appeared in the ceiling, and a great pointed mass of metal protruded.

It was a minute before the men, stunned and bruised, were able to recover themselves sufficiently to examine this object.

"By my head! A torpedo!" exclaimed General Massupu, as he staggered up to the metal. "Thank the blessed fates, it was a dud! Otherwise, none of us would be here to tell the story!"

"How could it be a torpedo?" questioned Will. "I thought we were a hundred feet below the Great Cavern."

"Yes, but evidently," Massupu sighed, "Murkambu has torpedoes which will burrow a hundred feet through earth and rock."

A long pregnant silence greeted this remark.

"That means that no matter where we go," at length declared the Timur, "we will not be safe from attack."

"It means the end!" groaned Massupu.

"That is, O Timur," suggested Will, "unless we are willing to try Blue Nitrolene."

The Timur smoothed out his ruffled robe, and stroked his long beard thoughtfully.

"It is either surrender—or the new weapon!" asserted Minister of Defense Hamur.

"There is no time to lose, either," put in Massupu. "Shall it be said that we gave in when even the tiniest chance for victory remained?"

"Victory? Victory?" flung back the ruler, as his tall tottering form paced the floor in agitation. "What victory can there be now? No matter how the war ends, we are all defeated! Our lives are blasted, our country torn up! Our only choice is the least among many evils!"

"The least among many evils is Blue Nitrolene, O Timur!"

But the sovereign still hesitated; and might have continued to hesitate, had a fresh upheaval not shaken the room for more than a minute with earthquake throes. This time no protruding mass of metal was seen; but all

faces were pale, all eyes distended with alarm.

"You see, Your Loftiness," said General Massupu, "there is no tunnel deep enough to protect us."

"True," admitted the Timur, sadly. And then reluctantly, bitterly, in the manner of one who passes a death sentence. "Perhaps, as you may say, Manu, Blue Nitrolene is the least among many evils. Largun-see, our Minister of Chemistry, will conduct you to our laboratories, whose entire facilities are to be placed at your disposal. It is my order!"

But as Will arose and started out in company with Largun-see, the Timur's gloomy mutterings followed him.

"Heaven help us now! Heaven forgive me for this choice!"

NEVER had Will seen any laboratory so excellently equipped as the one to which Largun-see led him. Covering several acres of a gallery below the Great Cavern, it was provided with every instrument that Will had ever seen or imagined, and scores that he had neither seen nor imagined. There was every variety of test-tube and retort; electrical devices for converting great quantities of water instantly into steam, and for turning steam to ice; inter-atomic machines, shaped like seige-guns, for dissociating the elements; engines, looking like cabinet radios, which would make qualitative analyses of most substances as rapidly as an adding machine would total a column of figures; as well as immense quantities of most of the less unstable elements and more common compounds.

Best of all!—there were dozens of skilled assistants ready to serve Will's every nod and call—a striking contrast to the one-man home laboratory where he had previously worked and made all his discoveries!

Thanks to these facilities, it was only a few hours before he was in possession of some of the innocent-looking sea-blue compound that was to decide the fate of Le-Mur.

CHAPTER XI

The Destroyer Breaks Loose

WILL has always maintained that he never made more than a few grams of Blue Nitrolene during all this time in Le-Mur. He has always claimed that this amount, although capable of causing prodigious damage, would not of itself have sufficed to produce the unparalleled catastrophe that brought his days in the underground world to their dread climax. Some unidentified foreign substance, in quantities almost too slight for detection, must have been mixed with the Blue Nitrolene in the course of its manufacture, and produced a change in some of its essential characteristics, and a heightening of its potency.

Such, at least, is Will's explanation. For the fact remains that Blue Nitrolene, terrible as it was in the experiment that I witnessed in Will's laboratory, p r o v e d inconceivably m o r e frightful among the caverns of Le-Mur.

Only a few hours after the first mild-looking particles had been produced in the laboratory, the forces of Murkambu were to be confronted with a new weapon—and one that, for sheer horror and destructiveness, put to shame such puny devices as the Eagle Torpedoes and the Sky Serpents.

It was a company of Crawl Troopers who first encountered the Blue Nitrolene as they wound, bellies to earth, through one of the wide branching galleries beneath the Great Cavern. Their advance had been strangely un-

impeded; and, feeling that the Timur's resistance was about at an end, they had gone forward for miles, and were ready to sweep into the main cavern itself and take possession of some of the outposts of the Timur's capitol. Then suddenly, in front of them, through a long narrow shaft in the earth, a projectile was dropped.

It was no larger than an orange, and consisted of a glass sphere, which shattered on striking and released several tiny pale blue particles. But no sooner had the foremost of the Crawl Troopers caught a glimpse of the blue specks than a change came over the entire scene.

Almost instantly, there was a hissing as of a thousand steam exhausts in simultaneous action. Spouts of smoke, and clouds of sulphurous vapor shot toward the cavern roof; a bubbling arose from the floor, which began to glare and seethe, with an effervescence as of a powerful acid devouring a metal; and, extending from small foci, the bubbling patches spread in concentric circles, like slowly widening ripples on a pond . . . until, after a minute or two, the entire floor was a molten, fuming, blazing mass.*

AT the same time, a torrid heat shot out from the center of infection. The skins of the men were blistered, their eyebrows were singed, the clothes of some of the foremost took fire. Panic arose among them; with cries as of trapped animals, they sprang to their feet; and, thrusting, shoving, squirming, fighting with fists and elbows, they battled their way back toward safety. But many of them, overcome, lay writhing in the path of the destroyer, whose hissing, seething waves spread out to consume them.

Before the day was over, a score of companies of Murkambu's troops had met the same fate. Every advance guard of the rebels had been routed; and several of the main contingents had been driven back before the glowing, steaming fury that was everywhere dissolving the solid rock and earth.

Within less than three days, raids had been made into Murkambu's territory, and bombs containing small quantities of the blue destroyer had been dropped by "do-and-die" squads of loyal soldiers—one or two of whom, unexpectedly, survived and returned to tell of the consternation they had caused, the disruption of normal life, the panic flight of the populace, who fled in stampeding crowds, while the sizzling foe ate through the pavements of cities and the walls of buildings with an insatiable, irresistible, unceasing rapacity.

The Sight-Sound Relayer, meantime, had confirmed the stories, and had shown streets gashed with enormous craters, which slowly widened, while black fumes arose from the flaming depths; solid hillsides which melted, and ran in rivers that gradually dissolved in gas; and great masses of machinery, with steel rods, wheels and boilers, which disappeared like kindling wood in a conflagration.

It seems strange, when one recalls the subsequent cataclysm, that the general danger was not at first realized. It was thought—and Will confesses that he shared in the general delusion—that only Murkambu's territory was

*Obviously the effect here is of a progressive atomic disintegration, although not on an absolute scale, so that matter is annihilated completely, and changed into energy. Rather, there is a disruption of normal material forms into other normal material forms, with a partial release of energy in the process. The result of such releases of energy might be compared to the burns (on human flesh) caused by radium emanations. A great amount of damage is done to flesh in this manner, by contagion, and resultant irritation not in itself the action of the original agency.—Ed.

menaced. Hence there was rejoicing among the Timur's followers.

"A few days more, and we will have crushed Murkambu's resistance!" they said. "A few days more, and we will have won the war!"

Time was to prove their predictions correct—so far as they went. But it was also to prove that they did not go far enough.

ONE day the Timur was sitting in his underground retreat, amid a group of his advisers. Although it had been impossible for him to return to his palace of many-domed crystal, which had been wrecked by rebel raiders, he was in a happier mood than for many weeks. He was smiling once more with his old patriarchal benignity; and the luster had come back into his eyes, which had been wont to look dull and faded of late.

"Yes, Your Loftiness," General Massupu was informing him, "there are only a few more active contingents of Murkambu's troops in the field—and it will take us but another day or two to subdue them."

"Thanks be to the Manu!" exclaimed the ruler, fervently, with a nod in Will's direction. "We will have to decorate him with the Purple Plume of the Loyal Defenders, the highest honor we can grant."

"But the ruin caused by this war—it will take us many years to repair it!" sighed Minister of Construction Zampum. "Our cities are mere debris—"

He was interrupted by a peculiar whizzing and buzzing from a horn-shaped brass instrument to his right. And he pressed a little button at one end, and instantly the room was filled with a booming voice. For the machine, which was a development of the Sight-Sound Relayer, performed the same functions as our telephone, except that one did not have to listen through a tube but could hear at a distance of many feet.

"The Timur! His Loftiness the Timur! I would speak with the Timur!" shouted the voice.

"Who is it?" called back Minister Zampum.

"It is I, Minister of Defense Hamur! Would you have my password?"

Several words, whose meaning Will could not recognize, were spoken; then the Timur raised his voice:

"What is it, Zampum? It is I, the Timur! Where are you? What do you want?"

"Important tidings, Your Loftiness! Important tidings! I am now at the front! I have received a message from Murkambu!"

The Timur's voice trembled just a little as he inquired:

"And what is the message, Zampum?"

"He wishes to arrange a conference, Your Loftiness. To sue for peace."

THE assembled men stared at one another with significant smiles; several thankful sighs were heard.

"Peace is what we all want," replied the Timur. "But it must be on our own terms."

There was a brief pause before the voice of the invisible resumed,

"No, Your Loftiness, it must be on his terms."

Oaths and mutterings were heard throughout the room.

"What is that, Zampum?" demanded the ruler, in a voice of resentment. "Have you gone off to the enemy's side? If Murkambu sues for peace, why must we grant it on his terms?"

Another weighted pause ensued; and then the reply was heard, distinct and emphatic:

"Because, O Timur, there is a greater

enemy than Murkambu at the doors. Because we must fight at his side to throw down a foe that threatens us all."

"But there is no foe beside Murkambu!"

"Indeed there is, O Timur! Murkambu sues for peace not for fear of our warriors, but for fear of Blue Nitrolene. It spreads everywhere like a plague. It eats away buildings, and undermines galleries, moving in ever wider circles. It menaces both sides alike. Ask Minister of Construction Zampum. Yes, ask him—and after that I will speak with you again."

Gravely the Timur turned toward his Minister of Construction.

"What is this, Zampum, that you have been keeping from me?"

Zampum's face turned a flaming red.

"There was no need to alarm you, O Timur, for we thought a remedy would be found. But it is truly as Hamur has said. Blue Nitrolene keeps spreading like a fire, and we do not know how to quench it. We fear it more than we do the enemy."

A black scowl had lined the Timur's face. Angrily he stalked toward Zampum.

"It is an evil thing," he said, "that I have not been told. Come! I must see for myself! By my beard! If you keep any information from me now—"

With a hasty twist of his fingers, Zampum was adjusting the dials of the Sight-Sound relayer. An instant later, the face of the Timur, as he looked and listened through the instrument, took on an expression of amazement, consternation, horror. For at least five minutes he remained at the machine, twitching slightly; then, in a snapping, decisive manner, he turned toward the horn-shaped brass contrivance.

"Hamur? Still there?" he demanded.

"Yes, Your Loftiness!"

"Then get into touch with Murkambu at once! Tell him that his terms are accepted!"

With a sigh, the Timur sank back; and, panting heavily, had to be supported by two of his followers.

WILL meantime had hastily adjusted the Sight-Sound Relayer to his eyes and ears, and had caught glimpses of smoking craters, wide as those of volcanoes, into which great buildings were collapsing, while from their flaming depths poured spouts of steam and immense twisting black wreaths of smoke. He saw the streets of a city crisscrossed with spreading fissures, from which thick yellow fumes were rising; and watched the submergence of a whole wide avenue, covered with trees and fountains, which sank with an ear-splitting roar into the blind depths, leaving only dust-clouds and ashes.

"There is indeed a greater enemy than Murkambu," sighed the Timur, still breathing heavily. "We can have no further thought of fighting him now."

Then, turning toward Will with a challenging blaze in his eyes, he demanded,

"You are the one to help us, Manu! You have introduced Blue Nitrolene! Now you must tell us the antidote!"

Ringed about by a circle of hostile faces, Will felt like a stag cornered by hounds. The Ministers, so tolerant and friendly only a few days before, now glared at him with bitter, angry eyes. And Will's heart sank, for he knew that he had no antidote for Blue Nitrolene; that never, in his experiments on earth, had it required an antidote, since it had burned itself out in time. So how would it be possible for him now, without long experimentation, to determine just what had gone wrong and how it could be remedied?

"Your Loftiness," he replied, "if you will give me but a few days—"

"A few days?" flung back the Timur, savagely. "In a few days, it may be too late!"

"I am sorry, Your Loftiness, but I know of no remedy—"

"Huh! I see it all now!" interrupted General Massupu, pointing a threatening finger at Will. "It is a plot! He was in the employ of Murkambu! It is a scheme to throw us down!"

Concurring murmurs and growls sounded from half a dozen throats.

"It's as clear as light—Fifth Tower penetration!" thundered Minister Zampum. "The miserable spy!"

SEVERAL of the ministers drew closer to Will, bristling, with steely flashing eyes, like wolves preparing to spring.

"Now, now, hold back there!" counselled the Timur, facing his followers sternly. "If the Manu was Murkambu's spy, how is it that his invention threatens our enemy as much as it does us?"

A brief silence greeted this question. But General Massupu was quick to reach the solution,

"Then he is a spy sent from the Upper Air to overthrow all Le-Mur! That is it! He is a spy from the Upper Air!"

Even the Timur gave a start at this accusation; and Will could see the growing enmity in the eyes of every one present.

"Why should I be a spy from the Upper Air?" he attempted to protest . . . when he was cut short by furious cries.

"Down with him! Throw him out! Take him away! To the Obliteration Rooms!"

It was with difficulty that the Timur quieted the disturbance. The ministers, forgetting their self-control, seemed bent upon finding a scapegoat. Their shaking fists, their contorted features, their malevolently shining eyes boded no good for Will as they stormed about him threateningly, while he glared at them in erect, defiant dignity.

"Come! Give the Manu a chance!" ordered the Timur; although his cool glittering glance showed that he too was by no means as friendly as of old. "We will let him seek an antidote for Blue Nitrolene. Surely, if he wishes, he can unmake what he has made. So I will once more open our laboratories to him."

"Largun-see," he went on, turning to his Minister of Chemistry, "you will conduct the Manu back to the Central Laboratory!"

And then to Will, as he started away in the company of Largun-See:

"Make haste, Manu! Remember, the safety of us all may depend upon it!"

From the grim, warning glances cast him by several of the ministers, Will knew that, regardless of the safety of Le-Mur as a whole, his own safety did assuredly depend upon the speed he made.

CHAPTER XII

To the Black Tower

WILL'S eyes, as he bent over the blue vials on the laboratory table, were red and bloodshot. His lean form twisted and untwisted like a reed in the wind; his fingers twitched; low mutterings came from between his clenched teeth.

"God," he exclaimed, throwing down a test-tube so violently that it shattered, and spilt its sputtering contents over the green porcelain basin, "it's all no use! No use under heaven!"

In the reeling condition of his head, he hardly knew how long he had been

laboring over the problem. Certainly, for more than two days, during which he had not had three hours of sleep. He was feeling crushed, smothered, like one who does battle with a sand-storm; he should have had months or even years to wrestle with the problem!

Sagging down upon a three-legged stool, he sat with his face buried in his hands; while from just beyond the barred doors a shout arose, followed by the angry mumbling of many voices, which rose and fell, and rose and fell, menacing, insistent, savage. The doors rocked and shook as threatening hands seized them from without, until the whole room seemed to tremble.

"There's no quieting them, Manu," said Largun-see, the Minister of Chemistry, as he came up to Will and tapped him gently on the shoulders. "I never would have believed it possible—our civilized Le-murians becoming so bloodthirsty!"

The voices from without had become louder and more articulate; at every entrance to the laboratory, a mob was clamoring.

"Give us the Manu! Down with the Manu, the Manu! Give us the spy, the traitor! Tear him to bits . . . The spy! . . . The Fifth Towerist! He has ruined our land!"

"Listen, Manu," counselled Largun-see, "better get out while there's still time. Over there to the left, just beyond the Radium Room, there is a trap-door in the floor—"

"Down with the Manu! Down with him! The traitor! The spy! The Fifth Towerist! Tear him to shreds!" clamored the voices, in an increasing din.

Will looked up apprehensively, but shook his head. "No, Largun-see, I'm not going to run—not while there's a ghost of a chance—"

"But the mob, Manu—it's made up of wild beasts. You don't know them. They're hungry for your blood. They blame everything on you—"

The doors were shaking until it seemed as if they could not hold out much longer.

"Manu –Manu—down with him! Grab him, catch him, crush him to bits!" thundered the rabble, while the blows of fists and heavy implements smashed against the barricades.

AT the same time, an even more frightening phenomenon broke out. On the roof just above Will, a sudden bright patch had appeared, to the accompaniment of an ominous sizzling and hissing. Widening from a narrow focus, it spread out in a slowly expanding circle, radiating a furnace heat and giving forth clouds of smoke and steam through a freshly made opening in the roof. Will caught a glimpse of the Great Cavern, although, as he knew, this had been separated from the laboratory by more than ten feet of solid rock!

At his first glimpse of the glaring patch, Largun-see had given a gasp and a sigh. "By my robe! it's the end!" And, without another word, he rushed toward the trapdoor beyond the Radium Room.

Will, as he stared at the devouring fury in a sort of fascinated daze, realized that it was indeed the end. Within a few hours, Blue Nitrolene would have destroyed the laboratory!

Knowing that he had lost the battle; and knowing, also, that this meant the doom of Le-Mur, Will at first had scarcely the ambition to save himself. Why not go down amid the ruins of the world which he had unwittingly destroyed? At the doors of the laboratory, he could still hear those wild-beast cries, "Death to the Manu! Don't let the spy out! Grab the

traitor! Pound him to bits!" But he scarcely cared if the mob broke in and seized him.

Then all at once—and he could not say just how this happened—it was as if a cry had come to him from a long distance. The face of Ilwanna framed itself before him, Ilwanna violet-eyed and auburn-haired as he had known her, but with her lovely features contorted with a look of terror and distracted pleading.

And suddenly, in some strong but irrational way, the conviction fastened itself upon him that she might not be dead after all. The thought came to him that she might not only be alive, but in need of him; the idea that, if there were so much as one chance in ten thousand that she survived, it was a chance which he must not throw aside.

No! though the world were tumbling about his ears, he must seek her out, must learn the secret of her fate—and if, as he had long assumed, she were beyond his power to find, then he would be no worse off than now.

Just the faintest wisp of a new hope animated him as he hastened along the broiling laboratory, from whose ceiling pebbles and great rocks were beginning to fall. He passed the Radium Room; found the trapdoor, which Largun-see, in his haste, had left open; darted down the winding stairs; and closed the door behind him just as the mob, with a triumphant push, burst in at the further end of the room, with shouts of, "Catch the Manu! Beat him down! Pummel him! Kill him!"

BY a circuitous route, through small winding side-tunnels, he made his way to the surface of the Great Cavern, where he paused in horror and consternation. What a change had come over the huge concrete columns which, shaped like inverted funnels, supported the roof! Bent as by an earthquake, some of them were horribly warped and twisted; others leaned like the famous tower at Pisa; one, with the hissing, seething furies eating away at it, had been severed at the base. And, in the roof, immense bulges had appeared, which seemed to the observer to deepen even as he watched. The marvel was that the roof had not already fallen!

Picking his way across the deep trenches and over heaps of refuse where here and there he could make out a still, man-sized form, Will hastened toward the quarters assigned him some time before by the Timur.

All was in confusion about him. Here and there some stray child ran crying, like a lost dog, looking for its parents; here and there some group of crazed refugees wandered, wailing and tearing at their hair. Old men tottered along on canes, their backs weighted down by burdens, looking for escape they knew not where; mothers trundled along with shrieking children, or fell fainting by the way, to rise and totter onward again; sturdy young men tried in vain to help their women as they struggled from the burning ruins of their homes, staggering on in search of a refuge, past other fugitives who staggered on in the opposite direction.

Blue Nitrolene was, apparently, doing its work thoroughly! To the west there was a continual line of flame; while the dull booming of explosions came time after time to Will's ears, and now and then the earth beneath him shuddered.

In their terror, most of the refugees hardly took any notice of Will; although one or two paused to point with accusing fingers, or even to spit or curse. And there was one—a brawny, baleful-eyed man—who picked up rocks and hurled them in a shower which Will barely managed to escape.

"Death to the devil!" he cried. A mob arose at his heels and ran after Will; and he might not have been able to save himself had it not been for a timely fissure which opened up between them in the earth, with clouds of black vapor where Blue Nitrolene was spreading from an underground corridor.

Meanwhile the din had grown to ear-splitting proportions. A continuous dull booming, as of distant thunder, was varied by occasional roars and crashings as buildings sagged and tottered; by an incessant rumbling and jarring as great buildings collapsed; and by the shrill hissing and screeching of steam, as geysers broke out from the ground at the most unexpected points.

At the same time, a sweaty, humid heat possessed all things. Foul odors, as of decay, mingled with the deadly stench of escaping chemicals, whose noisome gasses irritated the nostrils and eyes; cinders swirled everywhere on a hot wind, and the smoke-clouds blackened everything.

It was, indeed, the latter fact that enabled Will to make good his escape, for his hands and face became covered with a sooty smear, which served to disguise him, and permitted him to mingle inconspicuously with the refugees, all of whom were likewise besmudged.

HAVING with difficulty reached his rooms, Will found one of the flashlights he had taken with him from the Upper Air; equipped himself with some compressed food, and water, and set out toward Murkambu's mansion.

In a straight line, on the surface roads, the distance was not more than a few miles, but it seemed to Will that he struggled for hours through that seething, horror-stricken world. Once he almost slipped and lost his life in a deep crevice in the earth; a little later, he was threatened by a madman, who ran about in wild circles, swinging a club and howling menace at every passer-by; again, he had to go around a vast area in which a pit as deep as the Grand Canyon had opened, vomiting forth continual waves of yellow sulphurous vapors. At times he staggered, and felt ready to fall; at times his bloodshot eyes could scarcely make out the path ahead . . .

But always the vision of Ilwanna kept flashing before him, with her appealing, urgent eyes; and he knew that he must not give up until he had had word of her.

How much later it was he could not say, but at last he stood before Murkambu's palace. The pale green and blue fountains had ceased to flow from their tinted bases. The pansies, which had grown as large as saucers, were trampled and broken; the ground was strewn with ash; ash covered the walls of the bubble mansion, which, once glowing with a luminous pearly light, was now dull and lifeless of hue.

In the alabaster court, where Will had first seen Ilwanna by means of the Pellucid Depth Ray, a fountain of smoke and fire had sprung up; the busts of the venerable men and Venus-like women had fallen from their pedestals; the walls of the buildings, with their beautiful painted inscriptions, were dented and crumbling.

With a sigh, Will passed on to the main entrance of the palace. The door stood open; but all was dark and silent inside. The furniture was strewn about in confusion, bearing every sign of a hasty departure; but no servant walked those unlighted aisles, no guard stood at attention, no spear gleamed, no voice sounded. Will felt as if he had entered a tomb—all the more so when the thought of his beloved came to him,

and he murmured, beneath his breath,

"Ilwanna, where are you? Where are you?"

For many minutes he wandered through the courts and salons, his lungs choked with the vapors that were pouring in in ever-thickening streams. Was he not engaged on a mad quest? In his heart, he believed so—yet in his heart he knew he could not quit, not while the burning image of Ilwanna remained with him, her violet eyes beseeching,

"Make haste, beloved, make haste!"

AT last, between two ash-scarred colonnades where blue hydrangeas had bloomed, he met an old, bent man who wandered witlessly to and fro and wore the drab yellow uniform of the servant class.

"The Upper Air devils," he kept muttering to himself, in an incoherent, aimless manner, "the Upper Air devils have destroyed us!" and then, glancing at Will with eyes that spoke no recognition, "Is it not so, friend, the Upper Air devils have destroyed us!"

"Yes, the Upper Air devils!" agreed Will, to humor him.

The old man spat out in disgust, and was repeating his statement as if it were something new, when Will questioned him,

"Tell me, old father, do you know where Murkambu is?"

"Murkambu? Murkambu?" repeated the man, as if striving to grasp at an idea that eluded him. "He is gone, gone—they are all gone, gone! Run away from the Upper Air devils!"

"And Murkambu's daughter, Ilwanna? Do you know where she is?"

Will's voice trembled as he put the question, but the old man merely went rambling on.

"The Upper Air devils—they have destroyed us, destroyed us!"

In his impatience, Will seized the old man, and shook the frail frame.

"Murkambu's daughter — Murkambu's daughter!" he repeated. "Ilwanna—Murkambu's daughter—do you know where Ilwanna is?"

"Ilwanna? Ilwanna?" echoed the dotard, in a wailing, wandering voice. "Ilwanna? Ilwanna? The Upper Air devils have destroyed us—"

But Will shook his victum more energetically than ever, and at last a faint gleam came into the faded eyes.

"Ilwanna? Ilwanna? Was she not the fair one, the lovely elf—he whom the Leader locked in the Black Tower?"

"The Black Tower? Black Tower?" gasped Will. But by no amount of violence or urging could he extract any further information. "The Upper Air devils," the man went on raving, "Upper Air devils have destroyed us—destroyed us!"

Yet even the fragment of information —incomplete and unsupported as it was —had come as a breath-taking revelation. For was it not possible that Ilwanna was alive after all?—alive although a prisoner in the Black Tower?

CHAPTER XIII

Ordeal by Fire

THE Black Tower was well deserving of its name. Surrounded by a deep moat and high coal-black walls, it was draped in perpetual mourning as it stood on a low ridge of earth some distance back of Murkambu's home. A tall stone edifice, with only a few narrow light-slits in place of windows, it was known as a place where political offenders languished, sometimes for years, without a trial and without prospect of release.

But if ordinarily repulsive, it was doubly so now. The roof of the cavern was caving in above it in a hundred-

foot bulge, shaped like a half orange. The ground about it was plowed up as by a gigantic dredge, and a crater that erupted jets of flaming liquid was widening in front of it, with connecting fissures that gave promise of devouring the entire edifice at almost any moment. And the heat, like that of a bake oven, blew over Will in searing breaths as he approached, and made him doubt if he would be able to reach it alive.

"God in heaven," he thought, "if there's anybody in there now, most likely he's cooked to a cinder!"

His lips were parched and cracking; his throat was dry; his limbs were burning in a fever-heat, but still he dragged his way on, around the crater with its spouts of blazing liquid, and toward the open main entrance of the Tower, from which the guards had evidently long departed.

As he passed through the gateway, he thought he could hear faint groans from somewhere within; and feeble, broken cries. He paused for a moment; snatched the keeper's keys from a rack on a leaning wall; and started inside. As he did so, the floor shook with a lurch as of a speeding train rounding a curve; and Will was thrown from his feet. Recovering himself, he saw that a crack inches wide had opened in the ceiling; while the floor was still trembling.

Guided only by his flashlight, he started along the dark aisle, which wound sharply, so narrow as barely to permit his passage. On either side were small iron doors, to some of which he applied his keys. But the first of them to open showed an empty room; the second let out a cloud of nauseous vapors, from which he had to flee precipitately; and the third revealed a lean, silent, grimly unresponsive form.

"Too late! Am I too late?" he wondered, as his keys slid into the lock of the fourth door. An instant later, an emaciated figure with streaming white hair came tottering toward him.

"Forgotten! All, all forgotten!" he thought he heard this bony apparition mourning, in a voice reminding him of a gibbering shade. Then, with his hands clutched over his breast, the figure reeled and fell; while a crash as of exploding dynamite thudded upon Will's ears, and the entire building shook.

Knowing the poor sufferer to be beyond his aid, he wandered on. In fast waning hope, he pounded on each door as he passed, calling out fearfully, automatically,

"Ilwanna! Ilwanna!"

But the echoes of his own voice came back to mock him along those twisted aisles.

"Ilwanna! Ilwanna!"

His head swayed in delirium; he gasped and coughed as the hot vapors choked his lungs; and once or twice he fell on a dark stairway. Surely, the one he sought was not to be found here!

BUT still he raised his cry, more feebly now,

"Ilwanna! Ilwanna, Ilwanna!" Was it only that he imagined that at last there came an answering call? What was that voice, thin, remote, unreal,

"Will, Will, Will?" Surely, his fevered mind was playing him tricks. But was not the sound repeated, "Will, Will! . . . This way, Will! . . . Here, here, here!" No! It must all be a cruel delusion!

Then suddenly his brain had regained its clarity. Suddenly his senses were alert, active. The sound—he knew now that it was not mere imagination!—came from above him, from beyond a twisted flight of stairs. Perhaps it was but the voice of a madman mocking him—still, did it not have a familiar ring?

Up the stairs he dashed, though there came a jolt that seemed almost to shake the building off its foundations. Beyond a barred door he paused, while his fingers fumbled with the keys. For a moment he could not find any to fit the lock; while from outside there rang a series of thunderous detonations that drowned out the voice from within.

Then the key was turning in its socket; the door swung open; and toward him, with a swooning movement, there sagged a figure which he half recognized, and yet did not recognize, so distraught was she.

"Ilwanna!" he cried; and clasped her even as she was falling to the stone floor.

IT was not until much later that he learned her story: how she had been knocked unconscious yet had escaped serious injury in the second rock-slide in the tunnel, which had finally separated her from Will; how she had been taken by Murkambu's men to the palace of her father, who had seen through her disguise and in his rage had sentenced her to the Black Tower; how she had been forgotten there, when her father and all his retainers had taken flight, owing to the devastation of Blue Nitrolene; but how, having been provided with more food and better accommodations than ordinary prisoners, she had managed to survive, though she was now at the end of her resources.

Her beautiful cheeks smeared with dirt, her eyes burning and tear-reddened, her lovely hair hanging wildly and disorderly over her face, her limbs shaking with weariness, she looked little more than the ghost of her former self—although after a little time, with rest and food, she would become once more the old radiant Ilwanna.

So, at least, Will thought as he held her, clinging and weeping, in his arms But only for a few seconds could they remain clasped together.

As if to prove this no time for love making, the house gave another spasmodic heave; while through the narrow slit of the window they could see hungry red tongues of flame reaching toward the cavern roof.

"Come!" Will murmured; and half led, half supported her down the twisted stairway, and into the glaring outer world. He was astonished to note how the erupting crater, with its flaming liquid jets, had widened during his short stay in the tower. Well for him that he had left the building! For, not five minutes after his escape, there came a roar as if the heavens were crashing; a mountain of crimson light jutted upward, with cascades of scattering sparks; and the entire tower, falling like a child's castle, was lost in the crater's fuming abysses.

But Will and Ilwanna had hardly time to look back at the dread spectacle. Though their heads ached and their fagged limbs rebelled, somehow they forced their way onward—onward toward the Golden Range, where Will had entered Le-Mur, and where he hoped to find the cave entrance that led back toward the Upper Air.

HOW they managed to reach this haven, after hours of tormented struggling, was more than he was ever able to explain. Everywhere they saw refugees groaning, or lying crushed by fallen stones; everywhere they saw the fissures in the ground widening, flame, smoke and steam pouring forth more voluminously. Yet finally they stood before the narrow tunnel in the earth, which, almost choked with rocks where Will had blasted his way out, showed a dark crevice barely wide enough to permit a man to wriggle through.

"The way back to the Upper Air

. . . if we can make it," murmured Will. "Are you willing to come with me, Ilwanna?"

"I am willing to go to the world's end with you, beloved."

As they stood looking back across the Great Cavern from the height of the Golden Range, they saw nothing but a waste of flame and cinders—a landscape dotted with steaming geysers, smoking craters, roofless buildings with their shattered interiors flung about like the entrails of slaughtered monsters.

Through the thickening smoke-clouds, a line of bloody red was spreading all about them; the roof-supporting columns were bent at every angle; waves seethed and rolled and noxious vapors poured where hills and valleys had been; while, with a low rumbling, the very roof began to tremble, and crash.

"Quick, for God's sake! It's the end, the end!" groaned Will. And, forcing Ilwanna ahead of him, he helped and pushed her through the little black crevice into the cave.

Even as he did so, they were stunned by a deafening roar, which pitched them both forward to the earth. And, while the reverberations still rang in their ears, they stared into a sudden blackness. The lights of Le-Mur had gone out!

As they began creeping through the cave, by the rays of Will's flashlight, a long blended wail as of myriads of terrorized men and women reached them from the depths of the doomed world.

THREE days later a party of scientists, exploring one of the limestone caverns that threaded the Whitley Range, came across two persons whom at first they took for dead—a man and a woman clasped in one another's arms, who appeared to have perished of hunger or exhaustion. It was only by degrees that they managed to revive the unconscious victims, who for days lingered near the dread border-line, before at last, thanks to the best of attention, they were restored to life and health.

The reader will, of course, recall the national sensation that was caused when it was found that the man was none other than Will Claybrook, the missing inventor; while the woman, who became his wife as soon as they were able to go through the ceremony, was reported to be a daughter of ancient Le-Mur.

Following his return, Will was a changed man. He no longer gave himself whole-heartedly to science; instead, he concentrated on a book on "The Life and Customs of the Le-Murians," which, he said, would occupy him for years. But there was a grimness about him, as of a man returned from the other side of the grave. I remember how, one evening when I paid him a visit, he was staring as of old through the eyepiece of the Pellucid Depth Ray; while at his side, shiningly beautiful and statlier than ever, stood the very person whom he had once delighted to observe through the same machine.

"See, Tom," he said, motioning to the eyepiece, "all that is left of Le-Mur!"

I looked; and before my eyes there spread the enormous reaches of the Great Cavern, the roof in places fallen, and mile-deep abysses scooped out where the floor had once been. From the depths, fuming vapors arose in sultry clouds, illuminated by the dull-red light of smoldering fires; but nowhere could I see even the tatters of a building, even a sign that human life had ever inhabited these voids.

"At last Blue Nitrolene burns itself out!" he stated, solemnly. "A few days more, and the Depth Ray will show us —blackness!"

Then with a growl, he raised an iron rod in the air and swung it as if to demolish the machine,

"Curses on the Depth Ray—which brought the doom of a world!"

"A world that would have brought its own doom, being rotten at the core!" exclaimed Ilwanna, leaping forward and restraining her husband's hand. "Remember also, Will, without the Depth Ray, we would not be together now!"

"Which is worth more to me than all Le-Mur!" he said.

As his hand reached out for hers and they stood smiling at one another, I knew he had indeed spoken the truth.

(Continued from page 6)

slightly to accommodate an extra story. We think this will meet with your complete approval. We would like your comments on the change.

WITH this issue we are presenting the long-heralded novel by Stanton A Coblentz which has been so in demand since the publication of his "The Sunken World" ten years ago.

"Enchantress of Lemuria" is the kind of story that lent stature to science fiction in its early days, and today, it still remains the kind of story that has the power to entertain almost beyond the best of contemporary literature.

We don't say this story is literature—we do say it is good writing and fine story-telling, and we emphatically say it is excellent pulp fiction. It is the kind of pulp fiction that we see every week in Satevepost—where a story appears on its entertainment excellence and its full-bodied completeness in every aspect.

WE all know Mr. Coblentz, and there's more about him on page 123, together with a picture, but there are a few things few of us know. Mr. Coblentz was almost the only writer of science fiction's dawn-days who foresaw its future—and wrote that kind of fiction immediately! Today, without a single change in his style, his presentation, his plot, his action, his development, he can stand beside the best of modern writers and be accepted as "right in the groove."

WHEN we considered presenting this story to you, we debated on the best cover scene to accompany it—and the best artist to do it. And we selected the scene you see on the cover right now—done by the master of the gadget and of dramatic action, Robert Fuqua.

In our opinion, this cover cannot be touched by any other artist in the field of imaginative mechanics. It supersedes as our favorite the now famous cover for "World Without Women" on the April 1939 issue. Robert Fuqua did that one, too, and he did the equally excellent March 1940 cover, too.

Definitely, he is the master of the gadget!

WE have a prediction to make about a writer in this issue. It concerns Jep Powell, who authors "Mutiny in Space." After you've read it, we think you'll agree that he has created a character that we all want to see again. And your editor predicts that you will see him again, not because we have asked the author to bring him back, but because you yourself will demand it. If you don't like the rhyming desert rat of space, we'll eat your hat!

THE return of David Wright O'Brien with his first novelet in some time, brings back to us a writer who has probably gotten more fan mail by *not* being in our pages than any other writer has by *being* there. "Where is O'Brien?" has been the cry. Well, here he is, with a yarn that we won't designate as humor (although it is based on an hilarious assumption), but as a crackerjack human psychology yarn.

We've all heard of the perfect man. O'Brien has created him. But it's what happens to a perfect man in our ordinary (and plenty imperfect!) world that makes the story one you'll remember.

It's a jewel right smack out Ireland—where all jewels (say the Irish) come from.

THE readers talk so much about the illustrations that maybe we ought to do a little of the same. Our new artist, Magarian, recently came up to see us, and reading the mail on his first illustrations, made a comment that we think he begins to bear out with his effort in this issue (and incidentally in the September issue of *Fantastic Adventures*). He said: "These readers know what they want—and by golly, I'm going to give it to them!"

PERHAPS the finest interior artist of them all, in not only our opinion, is the man who was slugged from all angles with his first efforts—but who didn't give up. He is Jay Jackson, whom today we are lucky to retain for our pages. Frankly, he is (with the exception of St. John), the only "real" artist who can present his talent in the pulp style without losing his individuality. We advise you to watch for him in big letters in the art world before too long.

THOSE of you who have been yelling for a Krupa cover will soon have your wish. Mr. Krupa is doing one for our companion magazine, *Fantastic Adventures*, featuring that popular little Martian, Oscar the detective. And soon after, he will come to this magazine with his first gadget cover, in which he will try to put a dent in Mr. Fuqua's reputation.

NEXT month we present the final story in the John Carter series. It is "The Invisible Men Of Mars." Although the fifth of the John Carter stories to appear, it is the fourth and last of the adventure which might properly be called "The Romance of Llana of Gathol." The first Carter story, "Giant of Mars," was not in any particular sequence.

WITH the December issue we will begin a new series of Burroughs stories built around that legendary world inside the earth which he has called Pellucidar. In them we will meet old friends: Tanar, David Innes, Abner Perry, and Dian, the beautiful.

ALL this fighting in the Holy Land brings to mind a story we once read by Arthur J. Burks, called "Scroll of Armageddon." In it, he gave the story of the final war, which today is being almost identically re-enacted in the same locale. We wonder if the outcome will be the same, and whether Burks may not have brilliantly seen the future as no other man has.

Here are a few of his predictions in that story: (1) Germany, sullen under the Versailles Treaty, would rise and crush France. (2) China would battle endlessly with Japan, with ancient yellow warriors using glittering modern weapons. (3) Japan would cast envious eyes on the Pacific islands, but the flag of a country as powerful as herself would say "Thou shalt not." (4) The din of battle in the Balkans would be heard around the world. (5) America would use her might to force her will upon the world and Japan would arm in belligerence to cry: "Is the Pacific your 'lake'?" (6) Mighty battleships would go to their doom in the Atlantic, stricken by the blows of giant shells. (7) Over Arabian deserts would flow the invaders from Europe, to flank the Holy Land. (8) So many planes would battle in the air that the soldiers on the ground would be lost in their shadows. (9) The Holy Land would be as a plowed field under the bursts of terrific shells.

He pictures also famine, more terrible than battle, pestilence, and cities piled high with dead. And finally he tells of the draining of the Dead Sea, a natural catastrophe caused by unleashed forces of war.

IN the light of present events, we cannot but wonder how writing science fiction can enable a man to predict the future so accurately. Is it because the logic put into this type of fiction is so well founded that the progress of events can be foretold as they will logically happen? It is something to think about.

IT suggests another thought to us: If Nostradamus had been a modern writer, writing for AMAZING STORIES, he could have placed his prophecies into concrete form, and definitely said what he meant, without the necessity of concealing his true meaning. Certainly, here might have been the most amazing writer of them all!

DURING the Decoration Day holiday, your editor went down to St. Louis to visit Robert Moore Williams, who sold his first story to this magazine, in our first Ziff-Davis issue, and copped our first cover (one of the two photographic covers which caused so much comment), and who has ranked first more times than any other writer with the exception of Don Wilcox.

Bob is working on something that we are sure you will like. He convinced us it was good in a few minutes.

Your editor, however, wishes to go on record for something that has nothing to do with writers, with science fiction, or with the future. It is simply this: St. Louis has more beautiful women than any other city your editor has seen, and that means even Chicago!

We wonder if *that's* why Bob moved down to the "hot" city?

WHICH brings us to the stopping point once more. We'll be back again next month with a lot more news. *Rap.*

"Why didn't I think of this before? The little angel has quit squeaking already."

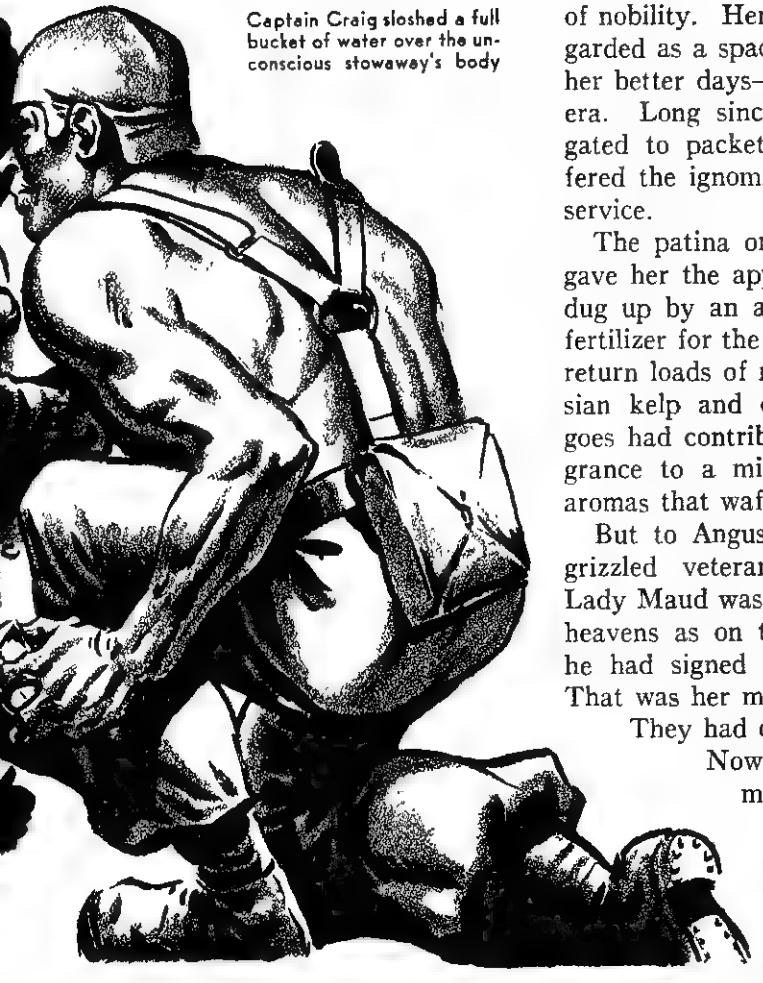
MUTINY
Fugua

IN SPACE

by

JEP POWELL

He was really a desert rat, but he seemed to fit aboard the Lady Maud out in space. And he had an odd way of fighting against mutineers



Captain Craig sloshed a full bucket of water over the unconscious stowaway's body

"NOW!" said Captain Angus Craig. "Go it, Lady!"

The Lady Maud yawed slightly as she shook herself clear of Earth's gravity, then leaped smoothly into free space. Captain Craig squinted up from his chart table to the conning screen and checked his course. He released a deep, pent-up breath and slapped the telegraph handle over to CUT ROCKETS.

"Take over, loddie," he said gently to his mate.

Lady Maud's aspect was hardly one of nobility. Her ladyship had been regarded as a spaceliner *ne plus ultra* in her better days—but that was another era. Long since, she had been relegated to packet duty, and later suffered the ignominy of tramp freighter service.

The patina on her once sleek sides gave her the appearance of something dug up by an archeologist. Peruvian fertilizer for the barren farms of Mars, return loads of nitrates, souring Venusian kelp and other odoriferous cargoes had contributed their lasting fragrance to a miasmic hodge-podge of aromas that wafted from her holds.

But to Angus Craig, a burry Scot, grizzled veteran of the spaceways, Lady Maud was the same queen of the heavens as on that distant day when he had signed on her as cabin boy. That was her maiden voyage, and his. They had come along together.

Now he was her owner and master and he gave her the same tender love a sentimental horse trainer bestows upon a faithful old plater. She

was his all, his business and his home, and the reek of her depths was balm to his tufted nostrils.

On this perilous voyage, Captain Craig's pride in Lady Maud knew no bounds. As if kind fates had given her one last happy fling at respectability, she was cast now in the role of "mercy ship," carrying medicines and a handful of doctors and nurses to fight the "purple scourge" on war-trampled Venus.*

Captain Angus betook his satisfaction for a stroll about the ship. Passing the lounge, he heard a babble of excited voices.

"Whut's gang on?" he inquired, stepping into the lounge.

A group of doctors and nurses parted and he beheld a bedraggled figure huddled on the floor.

"Stowaway," somebody said.

THE stowaway was a wretched sight, a tattered, grimy human derelict of indeterminate age such as one sees wandering aimlessly and hopelessly along any waterfront. But whatever his woes, they existed not for the nonce. They were drowned—nay, pickled—in alcohol. He was snoring gently and gave off a boozy effluvium that belittled Lady Maud's medley of odors.

Captain Angus tugged at his frayed mustache.

"Losh, the mon's had a wee drap too muckle," he said in a prize bit of understatement. He prodded the man with his toe. The vagabond snoozed on. Angus stepped to a fountain, drew a cup of cold water and dashed it in the stowaway's face.

"Ug—whoosh!" gasped the vagabond as the strange, icy liquid trickled down his neck.

"I wuz a-theenkin' a bit o' cauld water wud rouse 'im," Captain Angus grunted. "What might be ye name, mon?"

The toper blinked woozily.

"Dreyfus Slagg is my proper tag; a tough ol' cuss an' they call me 'Fuss.' I'm a rootin', tootin' desert rat. Now someone tell me where I'm at."

A nurse giggled.

"Ye're a lang way fra a desert noo," Captain Angus told him solemnly. "On the gude ship Lady Maud, a-boond furr Venus."

"Ulp! Venus, you say? Oh my soul, why'd I ever stray from Hellcat Hole?" Fuss stared about in befuddlement. "This is the fust space ship I was ever on. Now I guess I'm headed to hellingone." A shudder of fear shook his gaunt frame.

"Where'd you get the Shakespearean complex?" sneered Dr. Mark Watling, a young medico who had been kicked out of an interneship at a New York hospital because of annoying nurses.

"I can't help this rigmarole. They call me the Bard o' Hellcat Hole."

"He should be dumped through the disposal chute," Watling said sourly. "Maybe he'd like being a space rat. Or maybe he'd sprout wings and be a bat." He snickered evilly.

"Nay, I wudna commit murrder," Captain Angus declared. Then in a tone with a trace of anguish, "But I'm a-theenkin' he'll be eatin' regular, an' who's to pay furr it?"

"You'll be safe enough if a Jovian space raider doesn't take us for a Martian supply ship and blow us to kingdom come," Dr. George Gray assured the unwitting voyager.

* Peace-loving Venus had sought to maintain strict neutrality toward the bloody struggle between Jupiter and Mars but the aggressive Jovians had occupied Venus "protectively," ravished her of food and fuel and established invasion bases there. As a result of widespread malnutrition and exposure, epidemic was rampant on Earth's hapless neighbor.—Ed.

A sudden silence fell over the little group. They had agreed in advance that no one would speak of danger.

"But surely they'd see the big red crosses painted on our sides and the emblem of Earth's Federated Democracies," a young nurse said tremulously.

"Those devils are known to blast first and investigate later," Gray said. Then, "I'm sorry I mentioned it."

"Oh-h-h," groaned Fuss. "My spirits need boostin' a notch." He looked calculatingly, then hopefully at the captain. "Maybe you'd spare a snort o' Scotch?"

"Baloney," Watling snorted. "You're drunk as a fiddler's . . ."

"Nay, he might ha' been a bit daft at firrst, but he's talkin' gude sense noo," Angus declared. "Pick yesel' up, mon, an' come alang wi' me. Belike I cud find a puckle draps."

Fuss bestirred himself with a threat of alacrity, then he slowly came erect in sections, like the unfolding of a carpenter's rule. Amazingly long arms reached backward and propped a lank torso to a sitting posture. Spider-like legs moved unsteadily under him and raised him to one knee at a time. The final effort brought him to his prodigious feet, and his barren pate towered above the others in the lounge. With elbows thrust backward and out, bony hands and wrists dangling far out of his sleeves and body bent slightly forward from the hips, he swayed for a moment like a heron ready for takeoff, then lurched through the door in the captain's wake.

ODDLY, from the very first, the captain and Fuss took to each other like a boy and a stray puppy. And a strange pair they made. Shaved, scrubbed and fed, and outfitted in an inadequate suit of Angus's cast-off civvies, Fuss presented a more respectable, but none-the-less ludicrous appearance as he trailed the skipper like a worshipful hound. Like a pet crane might be a more fitting simile.

The captain and his elongated shadow became Gus and Fuss to all members of the crew and medical corps—beyond earshot of the captain, of course.

Fuss was standing near Gus—hovering, rather—when the wireless operator clattered down a companionway and shoved a message into the skipper's hand. It read:

> Venusian chapter advises secret Jovian mine field almost enveloping Venus. Jovian government refuses to convoy you through danger zone. Under circumstances we cannot urge you proceed further. Should you continue mercy errand at own risk please advise. (Signed) M. Ortegas, Chairman, Red Cross War Relief Committee.

Gus muttered a Gaelic oath. A dangerous light flashed in his pale grey eyes and muscles bunched under his lean cheeks as his teeth bit together. The operator shifted his feet.

"I'll not be takin' the responsibeelity furr the ithers," the captain announced slowly. "I'll gi' the onswer after I've conferred wi' them."

Wordlessly he handed the message to Fuss. But Fuss did not bother to take it. Already his eagle eyes, from their lofty vantage point, had caught every ominous word over the captain's shoulder. Fuss nodded gloomily.

"Call a' passengers thegither in the loonge," Gus told Fuss. "An' members o' the crew what ain't at their posts."

Fuss shuffled away.

"YE'LL no have to make yurr deceesions wi' haste," Captain Gus

told the solemn group assembled in the lounge. "We wudna be a-settin' doon on Venus furr a gude twa-week, so ye can mull on it a day or so."

No one spoke for a full minute. Fuss fidgeted in his chair and uncrossed his legs—unwound them, rather. He cleared his throat timidly.

"Take my tip, for what it's worth. Turn 'round an' high-tail back to Earth."

"I vote to go on," Mark Watling spat. "I'm not frightened by that message. What do you say, Gray?"

"I think . . ." Gray hesitated. "I think we should abide by the decision of the women."

"Very gallant," Watling sneered.

Hilda Bangs, chief of the nurses, who looked as explosive as her name, sniffed scornfully.

"If you think my girls are weak-kneed sissies, you're sadly mistaken. I propose that everyone aboard, regardless of sex, have an equal vote."

The nurses chimed assent.

"Let's vote now!"

"Nay, twad be better to dygist the matter proper," Gus advised. "The morrow, belike, ye'll see the gravity o' it." Thereupon he strode from the lounge. Fuss tagged along.

THAT night the lounge of Lady Maud was the most cheerless spot in all the boundless reaches of space. Conversation was limited to strained, fleeting snatches. No one mentioned the danger that lay ahead, but no one thought of anything else. Tomorrow they would ballot on whether to turn back or continue into the teeth of danger.

The errand was an urgent one. Their medicines and their ministrations might save the lives of hundreds, even thousands of blighted Venusians—but did this justify their ploughing into the mine-infested space surrounding Venus, hurtling into almost certain death? Courage is one thing, foolhardiness another. Would continuation of their mission be sheer folly?

Gloom permeated every cranny of the ship like a noxious swamp vapor. One by one the mercy voyagers emptied the lounge.

Captain Gus, making the rounds of his ship, peered into the desolate lounge and nibbled thoughtfully at a wisp of his mustache. He switched off the light.

"I'll be a-turrnin' in noo," he told Fuss.

Fuss nodded and ambled after him to his cabin. Gus opened a cabinet, took out a bottle and carefully measured an exact inch into a glass. He pushed it toward Fuss. Fuss eyed it with the hurt look of a slighted child.

"Aweel," Gus sighed. He tilted a few more drops into the glass as readily as if he were giving up his life blood. Then he measured a drink for himself with equal precision.

They lifted glasses silently and tossed off their nightcaps.

"Gude nicht," Gus breathed.

Fuss kept his lips closed tightly as if to conserve the glowing warmth that was building up within. He made a gesture intended for a salute, stooped through the door and departed.

He went to his cubbyhole, shucked off his shoes and, somehow, maneuvered his length into the bunk. He tossed and rolled, folded and unfolded himself, but sleep eluded him. After what seemed like hours, he got up and stretched out the kinks. He decided to stroll through the ship. Perhaps he would find someone to talk with. Barefooted, he stepped into the corridor. It was as dark as the inside of a crow. He paused to feel the walls and get his bearings, then glided silently through

the stygian blackness like a ghost on stilts.

Far ahead a thin shaft of light shone through a crack in the power room door. Fuss made for it. Maybe a couple of the "black gang" sitting around chewing the fat.

"IT'S not mutiny, it's self preservation." It was Mark Watling's voice that grated through the power room door. "The others would be blasted to hell anyway. No reason we should go along with them. And we'll make enough out of the deal to—well, you could buy a ship of your own."

Fuss bent an ear to the crack.

"The others won't be blasted to hell if we turn back." It was Paul Vacetti talking now, Engineer Vacetti. "That's the part I don't like. All these innocent people . . ."

"We aren't turning back," Watling argued. "I've talked to almost everyone aboard. Most of them have made up their minds. When they vote tomorrow, the answer will be 'on to Venus'."

"They wouldn't vote to go on if they knew what . . ."

"Listen, Vacetti!" Watling snapped. "You aren't spilling *anything*. I made this deal with the Jovian agents because I knew I could count on you." He added significantly, "There's still an unsolved murder back in the States. Another 'American Tragedy' affair the police would like to clear up."

"I ought to kill you!" Vacetti hissed.

"But you won't, Vacetti. The whole filthy story about you is in that registered I mailed to myself just before we blasted off. You saw me mail it. It'll be held for me until I return. But, if I *don't* return, it will be opened and . . ."

There was a silence in which Fuss knew Vacetti shrugged resignedly.

"That's better," Watling said. "Just be sure your power converters go haywire at the right time. A Jovian raider will come alongside, transfer you and me and the cargo, then scuttle this stinking old tub with the others aboard."

"Why do they want to take our cargo and scuttle this old worthless hulk?" Vacetti asked.

"Dammit, man, they *need* these medicines and these food concentrates. And it's safer to scuttle her with all aboard. Dead men tell no tales. The story will be that Lady Maud was blown to bits by an internal explosion. We were the only survivors. We were drifting around in a space dinghy when the Jovian raider came along and rescued us. Neat, eh?"

Vacetti mumbled something inaudible.

"Get this, Vacetti," Watling growled. "Just in case you plan doing a little whispering before the balloting, it wouldn't do any good to turn back now. The Jovians have our trajectory; probably are watching us now. If we turn back, they'll swoop down like a hawk. They'll snatch the cargo and blast us all to hell. Understand? You and me included."

Fuss did not wait to hear more. He slipped swiftly back into the shadows and headed for Gus's cabin. Half way there he stopped to reconsider. Maybe it would not be a good idea to tell Gus yet, he mused.

"From what I've read, each Jovian ship bristles with guns from tail to tip, while there ain't a gun on this ol' crate that could make a pinto jump a gate. But flint-faced Gus, the stubborn old Scot, would be hell-bent for battle, like as not."

Fuss decided to wait at least until after the balloting to mention this new peril to Gus. Noiselessly he crept back

to his cubbyhole to nurse his woe.

No one could justly call Dreyfus Slagg an arrant coward. He knew the dangers of the desert and faced them unflinchingly. In his "great open spaces" he asked no quarter of anything that walked or crawled, but in astral space he was out of his element, bewildered.

EVERYONE aboard Lady Maud except members of the crew on duty were present for the opening of the ballot box. Captain Gus fingered a flat key.

"Be there any who've not voted?"

"No one except that roving bean pole," said Watling.

Fuss fidgeted. He had been uncertain about his eligibility.

"Let him vote," cried one of the nurses. "He has a life to live, or . . ." She did not finish.

"Aye," said Captain Gus. "He'll have his say."

Fuss took one of the ballots. He ambled to a secluded corner, licked his pencil thoughtfully, marked a cross on the ballot, and folded it carefully before dropping it in the box.

Gus unlocked the box and two nurses checked the ballots.

"It's on to Venus!" one of the checkers announced when they were half through the count.

"It's unanimous!" the other squealed a minute later.

Everyone turned to look at Fuss.

"Hooray for Fuss!" someone shouted. "He's no slacker." A little cheer went up.

Fuss was confused. Although he had voted the same way as the others, he was singled out for praise. Nevertheless, he felt elated. He drew his scrawny shoulders more erect.

"Them hippity-hop critters whose poppin' eyes look like a frawg took by surprise may not be people just like us, but I feel that sure as my name's Fuss, they have joy an' pain an' misery, hope and love and pride just like we. I've risked my life to save a dawg. I'll do as much for a human frawg. I was skeered at fust, but now that's past. The Rubicon's behind, the die is cast." He gave his flat chest a grandiose thump.

Gus looked at him almost fondly.

"I'm a-theenkin' the danger o' yon mine field is not sae fearfu'," Gus said assuringly. "Mony's the time I've picked ma way through the osteroid belt an' come oot wi' nary a scratch. Wi' a bit o' luck, we'll dodge the mines."

This heartened everyone except poor old Fuss who kept his portentous secret locked in his lean bosom. He ached to drag it out then and there and fling it before them all, confront Mark Watling with his nefarious plot. But Fuss was in the habit of grappling unaided with his problems. Except for an occasional spree in Hellcat Hole or some other desert outpost, Fuss always had shunned gregarious life. He had poured out his woes to the ample though uncomprehending ears of a pack mule, but human communion over his troubles was not within his recollection.

Days dragged by and Fuss stewed over his secret. He went off his feed and some feared he might lose weight, an eventuality others thought unlikely without the use of a bone-saw. Fellow travelers tried to offer sympathy but Fuss was inconsolable. Even the excited preparations for the traditional amateur program on the last night in space failed to interest him.

Finally, after two jittery days and nights (Earth reckoning) of creeping along cautiously at low deceleration, ever alert for mines, Lady Maud was hauled well outside Venus' sphere of gravity. Amateur night was at hand.

After an evening of entertainment and a good sleep—for those who could relax—Lady Maud would begin the dangerous last leg of her flight.

Swaddled in her perpetual cloud blanket, Venus loomed like a huge puffball. Hidden in the fringes of those dainty, frothy clouds were countless stratosphere mines. And Fuss knew that also lurking there was a sleek Jovian space raider, like a hungry spider waiting for its prey.

"AND now . . ." Old Doc Barker, master of ceremonies, consulted a small card, "Mr. Dreyfus Slagg, poet laureate of Hellcat Hole, will give his own narrative poem titled 'The Lynching of Slug Magoon.' Take it away, Mr. Sla . . ."

"Where's Fuss?" somebody demanded.

Mark Watling, leaning indolently against the door, snapped to attention.

"Where's that old scarecrow? Somebody ought to go and get him." He glanced nervously at his watch."

"He'll show up," Doc Barker said. "We'll go on."

The next number was a blues song by a nurse. As her last agonized note died away, there was an echo from deep within the ship. It came thickly and unsteadily:

"Ohhh-leee-deee-yay-eehooo . . . HIC!"

"Wheest!" Captain Gus snorted. "The ongrateful speldron." There was a sinking feeling within him, then he remembered that his cabin was well-locked, and breathed easier.

"On with the show!" piped a nurse.

Mark Watling was next. He was garbed in a cowboy get-up of oilcloth chaps and a flaming bandana around his neck. A pistol, borrowed from the captain, dangled at his hip. He did a cowboy ballad in the accepted nasal manner. His last note blended with another drippy off-stage number:

". . . . . on the range
"Where the beer an' cantaloupe play—yic!
"There never is heard a discouraging word
"An' the clouds are not skydee all da-a-ay."

"He's in the medical supply room," gasped a nurse. "He may get his hands on some poison. I'd better go get him."

Watling leaped to the door.

"No! Stand back!" he yelled.

"What's the matter, Mark?" Doc Barker demanded.

"Oh, nothing." Watling looked at his watch again. "To hell with that old tramp. Let's get on with the show."

Suddenly Lady Maud was rocked by a violent explosion. Most of the celebrants were thrown to the floor. Women screamed.

"Waesucks!" Captain Gus croaked, and made for the door.

Mark Watling went into action. "Stay where you are!" he bellowed, whipping out the pistol. "Hands up everybody!"

GUS halted and blinked foolishly. He opened his mouth but said nothing. Slowly his astonishment changed into a seething fury. His mustache bristled and quivered dangerously. It was a long moment before he could lay tongue to words.

"Sheugh! Ye sneakin' scoundrel!" he finally managed. "Whut's the meanin' of this nefeerious bizness?"

"It means I'm taking over, Craig," Walting leered. "And it's the end of the line for this rusty old boiler. Get to the power room, Vacetti, and do your stuff."

Vacetti moved toward the door,

avoiding the captain's eyes. But Gus sprang in front of him and glowered.

"Mutiny!" he spat. It was hardly more than a whisper but it dripped with scornful rage. "By crivens, ye'll pay furr this, ye creeshie dog!"

"Get g o i n g, Vacetti," Watling barked. Vacetti got going.

"You fool!" George Gray snapped at Watling. "Whatever your dirty game is, it won't work!" Then, "What was that explosion?"

"That was a signal from a Jovian raider," Watling replied with an evil chuckle. "It'll be here any minute."

A couple of nurses were crying softly, but not Hilda Bangs.

"You rat!" she hurled defiantly at Watling.

Gus found his voice again and began a steady stream of withering invective.

"Ye stinkin' verrmin," he seethed. "Ye laithsome, reivin' roscal. Put awa' ma pistol an', by faigs, I'll brak yurr worrthless neck wi' ony ma twa hands."

Watling did not seem to mind.

"Go ahead and have your fun, you old walrus," he sneered. He swung the pistol menacingly at the others, then back to Gus.

A long, gnarled hand appeared inside the door and reached slowly toward Watling. If Gus saw the hand, his eyes did not betray it. He continued his verbal flaying of Watling. When his abusive repertoire seemingly ran low, he called upon his stock of Gaelic.

Fuss' hand clutched the flaming bandana and gave a violent jerk. It threw Watling off balance for a moment, but that was long enough. Gus, pivoting like a discus thrower, brought his knotty Scots soupbone crashing into Watling's jaw. Watling went out as cold as last night's gravy. The pistol flew out of his hand and Fuss speared it in the air. George Gray and Doc Barker pounced on the prostrate Watling. Gus stood over him, trembling, as if yearning to deliver the *coup de grace* with a rugged brogan.

Fuss flourished his weapon and grabbed Gus by the sleeve.

"Come, Gus, everything's in hand in here. Let's go settle with that engineer."

AS they burst into the power room, Vacetti was crouched over one of the uranium converters.

"Stop!" Gus commanded. "Ye mutinous skellum!"

Vacetti whirled, snatching an automatic from somewhere. Two shots rang out as one. Vacetti's gun clattered against the wall. He slumped to the floor, grabbing at his stomach.

Fuss gazed at the writhing engineer.

"That was a bonehead play, you understand? I was born with a gat gripped in my hand." Then to Gus, "If that Jovian raider's comin' on the wing, let's hop to the room where you run this thing."

Several passengers and crew members jammed the door.

Gus snatched up the automatic and flung a cautious glance at Vacetti. He seemed definitely *hors du combat*. It was up to the doctors now. Gus ordered all men to their posts, then he and Fuss rushed to the control room.

The short range radio was sputtering when they reached there. Gus flipped a switch and moved a dial.

"Calling Lady Maud," came a voice with a thick Jovian accent. "Calling Mark Watling on Lady Maud."

"Onswer 'im," Gus told Fuss. "An' nae rhyme."

"You there, Watling?" the voice persisted.

"Sure I'm here I'll tell the world, and

I don't keer OUCH!" Gus dug an elbow into his ribs. "Yes, Watling speakin'."

"All okay, Watling? You in command?"

"All okay," Fuss declared. "What'll I do now?"

"Come 'longside. Come slow, and no fonny business."

Gus snapped another switch and a sleek Jovian ship loomed in the conning screen. It was only a few miles away and almost dead ahead, floating idly with rockets cold.

"Feelthy pirates," Gus spat. His mustache twitched and his knuckles whitened as he gripped the automatic fiercely.

"We're comin'," Fuss said into the microphone. Then to Gus, "Signal your boys to move up slow, like he said."

"Hae ye gone crazy?" Gus gulped. "We'll do no sich . . ."

Fuss looked at him pleadingly.

"Don't be like that, you stubborn ol' coot. I got an idee that'll sure bear fruit."

"Aweel," Gus said dubiously, chewing on his mustache.

LADY MAUD lurched forward and skittered off course. She righted herself, then bucked and dipped and rolled like a drunken porpoise.

There was an incessant clanging of the power room telegraph as Gus snatched frantically at the handle while Fuss spouted instructions: "Whoa! . . . Back! . . . Giddup! . . . Gee! . . . Haw! . . ."

"What kind of astrobatics is these?" demanded a Jovian voice. "What is wrong?"

"Keep your shirt on," Fuss shouted. "We got something wrong with our innards, but we'll get there."

Lady Maud cut rockets when mere yards from the big Jovian ship. A thrill quivered through her aged frame as she neared the magnificent raider. She swished her stern and sidled coyly toward the waiting Jovian.

Now their port airlocks were about to meet. Suddenly Lady Maud gave a most unladylike burp and lurched past. As stern cleared stern, Fuss barked an order. Lady Maud shied to port and simultaneously the full power of her driving rockets roared squarely into the tubes of the raider.

Lady Maud shot away in a wide, sweeping arc and came about just in time to see the raider literally go to pieces in space. An internal explosion, set off by Lady Maud's rockets, had blown the Jovian ship into a thousand bits. Not a creature aboard it could have survived.

Gus pounded Fuss's back in incontinent exultation.

"Lor," that settled yon raider furr fair," he gloated. "An' wha'd ye get the idea, Fuss?"

"From a flop-eared mule, an' that's a fack. Up front they're harmless, but hell in back."

As Gus' joy subsided, a sobering thought crept into his mind.

"Yon mine field still lies ahead," he sighed. "W'ell drift oot here 'til the morrow."

Fuss looked at him wistfully.

"Now that it's over, you know what I think? You an' me ought to go take a drink."

Gus led the way toward his cabin. On the way they looked in the lounge. Doctors, nurses and even one or two crew members languished in the throes of spacesickness. Watling, bound securely hand and foot, was the sickest of the lot. Two doctors and a nurse were moving about unsteadily, doing what they could to comfort their fellow travelers. Gus could do no more.

He announced the destruction of the raider and he and Fuss went to his cabin.

"I'll be a-breathin' easier," Gus said, measuring an exact inch into each glass, "after I pick ma way throo yon mines."

"Ah-h-h," Fuss breathed and set down an empty glass. "Use mule sense, Gus, with this caboose. Back up to the clouds an' then cut loose. You'll explode them mines for rods aroun', then drop through safely an' set 'er down."

"Loshtie me!" Gus gasped. "There's genius, Fuss, under that bauld pate. Wud ye conseeder a job as firrst mate?"

"Nay," Fuss replied solemnly. "The desert's where I belong. I'm a-thinkin' it's too late to teach a old dawg new tricks."

They gave each other a startled look, then laughed.

"An' I'm a-theenkin' a auld dog wi' gude auld tricks wud be a asset on my Lady Maud," Gus declared.

There was indecision in Fuss' face. He looked wistfully at his empty glass.

Gus seized the bottle and filled both glasses to the brim.

Silently they lifted glasses and nodded.

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SEPTEMBER ISSUE ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS JULY 18th!

AMAZING FALLACIES ABOUT WEATHER

By GERALD VANCE

So you think you can discuss the weather intelligently? Read on, MacDuff, and let light dawn upon your folly!

TO Mark Twain's famous "everyone talks about the weather, but no one does anything about it," we might add that in spite of all the talking done on this topic, most of it is pathetically ill-informed. You and I, and all of us, who have to depend on our great left toes as meteorological indicators, have come to accept a great many old wives' tales about weather just because of the fact that they've been so oft repeated.

Take the old bromide about the coldest winter weather coming when the days are shortest. That's nonsense. The shortest winter days run from December 21st to the 23rd, and it isn't until late in January that the earth stops giving out more heat than it receives from the sun.

And speaking of hot and cold, many of us have grown to have absolute faith in the time-worn saw which declares that summer is warmer than winter because the sun is closer to the earth at that time. As a matter of cold scientific fact, the earth is nearest to the sun on January 2nd. And we defy you to find us a generally more wintry day than an average January 2nd.

At one time or another we have all been warned that open windows during dazzling electrical storms are highly dangerous and form a sort of inviting channel through which lightning can strike. If you've chewed your nails to the quick over this bit of malarky, you can now relax. It has been scientifically proven that there's absolutely no basis of fact in this belief.

One of the most commonly cherished mistaken beliefs is that a change in the phase of the moon results in a change in the weather. Where this yarn originated, we're not certain. But we do know that a check of the records will show that barometric pressure changes go right merrily along in spite of any changes in the moon. And it is these changes in barometric pressure which give us our changes in the weather.

Don't ask us why is it a general belief that weather usually moves—in the United States—from the Atlantic coast across to the Pacific. Most of us can recall cringing at the news that New York is having a bad state of atmosphere, and expecting that the same demon storm ravaging the eastern coast will soon descend on us. The Weather Bureau will tell all of us, if we take the trouble to inquire, that our belief is not only all wet, but that we've exactly reversed the situation. Weather in the United States usually travels from west to east. A flurry of bad weather in Ohio, in other words, generally means that the same flurry will be bothering New York in a few days.

If you've ever lived on a farm—or even if you haven't—you'll recall the legend to the effect that thunderstorms cause milk to curdle. Sorry to disappoint you, but this, too, is sheer bunk Hot and very humid weather, in which occasional thunderstorms are more prevalent, favors a growth of bacteria. It is this growth of bacteria, caused by the humid weather, which causes milk to curdle. The thunderstorms haven't a thing in the world to do with it. Make your apologies the next time you see one.

Now here's one that every man jack of us has said at one time or another. "It is too cold to snow." Let us very hastily pull in our necks on this one. There is no actual basis of fact in it. Snowfalls as deep as two and three inches have been recorded while thermometers have been under the twenty-degree below zero mark.

And just to wind this thing up in a gush of wind, let's explode the common belief that tornadoes are confined to the Middle Western and Southern states. In spite of the fact that you'll find most of your tornadoes in this region, it's recorded fact that there's hardly a state in the Union in which a tornado hasn't stuck its ugly head. So there you are, now go ahead and talk about the weather!

Finknagle touched the wire—and hell broke loose in Gottschalk's basement

Ferdinand Finknodle's PERFECT DAY

by DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

He was 100% perfect, and he should have had the world by its heels—but somehow he didn't

"HAAAAAA!" the exclamation came explosively from old Doctor Gottschalk. "I think it is ready, my machine!"

Ferdinand Finknodle nodded vaguely in reply, his soul jarred from its ramblings in a private Paradise he had invented—a sort of Never-Never-Land, in which there was no Mrs. Finknodle to make his life Hell. He stared around the basement, at the bewildering machine with all its doodads.

"Good," he murmured, "that's fine, Doctor Gottschalk." He was wishing that the hour would pass, so that he could go home. But he knew Mrs. Finknodle's wrath would be terrible if he were to spend anything less than an hour with Doctor Gottschalk, their scientific neighbor.

"It's an opportunity to broaden yourself, having Doctor Gottschalk as a neighbor," Mrs. Finknodle was fond of saying. "So I want you to spend a little time with him at least three nights a week."

Doctor Gottschalk was babbling again, jerking Finknodle back to the bare reality of the basement. The basement with the crackpot machine and its screwloose inventor.

"My Perfection Machine will revolutionize Science!" the white haired old

man declared. "It will eliminate static charges around an individual, keeping that individual from veering from his proper groove."

Finknodle stopped gnawing his moustache long enough to remark,

"How nice."

"If you will recall, Finknodle," the old scientist went on, "I have compared perfection, absolute perfection, to a groove. A groove running in a straight line."

"Well," F i n k n o d l e ejaculated. "Well."

"The only trouble with the groove of perfection," Doctor Gottschalk burst forth again, "is the fact that there are so many static charges in the atmosphere. Static charges which make people veer from their groove. That is why no one, nothing, is perfect," the old man concluded.

"Is that a fact?" Finknodle ventured, wondering what the old man was talking about.

"Yes," Gottschalk nodded, "but my machine will eliminate such static, will make perfection!"

Finknodle wondered if he was expected to applaud.

"Tomorrow," said the old doctor, a wild gleam coming into his eye, "I will start my experiments with guinea-pigs!"

Finknodle glanced hastily at his watch. Glanced hastily and breathed a sigh of relief. His hour was up. He could go home now, and Mrs. Finknodle wouldn't be displeased. He rose swiftly.

"Sure thing, old man. Great things, guinea-pigs. Cute and all that. Well," he had edged to the basement door, had his hand on the knob, ready for flight.

The old scientist wiped his hands on his greasy smock.

"You must leave?" he asked.

"Sorry," said Finknodle, who was not in the least. "Sorry, old boy, but my wife will be expecting me."

"If you would do me a favor before you leave . . ." began the old man.

Finknodle looked at him suspiciously.

"What is it?"

"If you would stay just five minutes, I would like to line my machine up."

Finknodle hesitated. He suspected that if he didn't wait five minutes to help, the old blighter would tell Mrs. Finknodle on him, and he would be in for more hell. He shrugged.

"Very well."

THE old doctor beamed, grabbing him by the arm and leading him over to the front of the strange machine. He had grabbed the chair, also, and forced Finknodle down on it.

"It is like a camera," the old man explained, "and I just have to focus it for my guinea-pigs tomorrow. Sit where you are!"

Finknodle sat, obediently, patiently, while the old man did this-and-that to the gadgets on his machine. A bright light broke out from a bulb above him, bathing Finknodle in its white glare. Then another light flashed forth, its beam also centering on Finknodle.

"Right in line," murmured Doctor Gottschalk happily, still fluttering around the apparatus.

Minutes passed, while the old man tinkered and breathed heavily through his thin nose. Finknodle was rapidly becoming bored with the proceedings. It was taking longer than the five minutes agreed upon. Restlessly, he reached forth his hand, running his fingers idly along a set of red buttons on a projection of the machine beside him.

"Don't do that!"

Gottschalk's scream was too late.

There was a deafening explosion, splashing white flashes of light, and a shattering concussion knocked Finknodle off his chair. While the machine hissed and spluttered like a maddened thing, he lay stunned on the cold cement of the basement floor, Gottschalk's weird cries of horror coming faintly to his ears.

Then the machine stopped spluttering, the lights stopped flashing, and all was silent, save for the moans of the anguished old man.

"You have ruined my machine!" the old man screamed. "You have ruined my Perfection Machine! you Fool!"

Dazedly, Finknodle managed to climb to his feet, and he stood there, pale and shaking, looking at the old scientist. Purple with rage, Doctor Gottschalk was dancing first on one foot then the other.

Finknodle found his head was clearing, that his vocal cords were regaining force.

"A fine thing," he managed to splutter. "A fine thing. You . . . you tried to kill me!"

Thoroughly disgusted, still slightly dazed, and with the old man's cries of damage suits ringing in his ears, Ferdinand Finknodle marched out of the basement.

THREE minutes later, Finknodle marched into his own house, and found Mrs. Finknodle waiting for him in the kitchen.

Mrs. Finknodle was small and thin, with a waspish face, a sharp red nose, and eyes that were perpetually fixed in a commanding glare. Finknodle looked at her, standing there angrily with her hands on her flat hips, and wondered what in perdition he had ever seen in her.

"I have been keeping your supper warm," she began menacingly.

Finknodle's hand shot to the frayed fringes of his moustache, and his sly shoulders seemed to sag even further.

"Yes, Dear," he muttered dutifully, walking to the sink to wash his hands.

Splashing water vigorously along his wrists, Finknodle debated over telling his wife what he had done to Gottschalk's machine. By the time he was drying his hands, he had decided not to tell her right away. He'd put it off until tomorrow. Lord knows there'd been enough trouble for one day, without inviting more of it from her.

"You will be late for your bowling," Mrs. Finknodle said, as Ferdinand sat down at the table. Her voice was harsh, accusing, for bowling every Friday night during the bowling season with the Bloatarians was not Ferdinand's idea. Finknodle himself loathed bowling. Loathed it utterly. He also loathed the big, beefy, back-slapping Bloatarians.

But Mrs. Finknodle had decided, some six years ago, that it would be a good thing for her husband to take up bowling and join the Bloatarians. So Finknodle, without further argument, had become a bowling Bloatarian. And for six years, rain or shine, Mrs. Finknodle saw to it that he bowled.

"You'll be late," Mrs. Finknodle snapped, snatching his plate out from under his nose. "You can eat when you come home."

Finknodle opened his mouth to protest, then closed it. He hadn't been born a mouse. He'd just sort of been forced into the role as his years married to Mrs. Finknodle had piled one on the other, gradually breaking his spirit until it ceased to exist.

Finknodle sighed, a deep, long, lingering sigh, and rose from the table. He wasn't overly fond of his wife's cooking anyway. It was getting so that nothing really mattered much any-

more, just so long as he was able to keep Mrs. Finknodle's shrill voice to a well-modulated imitation of a fire siren.

In the hall to the Finknodle living room, Ferdinand found his hat. His wife hadn't followed him to the door, a fact for which he was mildly grateful. His eye caught a peg on the wall, and from sheer force of habit, Finknodle sent his hat sailing at it. He never hit the thing. It seemed symbolic of the futility of his existence.

Methodically, Finknodle stepped forward to pick his hat up from the place where it usually fell. But it wasn't on the floor.

Puzzled, he looked up to the wall peg. The hat was resting there, just as if it had been carefully placed. He'd made it!

Finknodle frowned, shook his head bewilderedly, and took the hat off the hook. Then, still shaking his head doubtfully, he put the hat on and stepped out the door.

ARRIVING at the bowling alleys, Finknodle viewed the scene that spread before him with a vague distaste. There was the usual sound of smashing pins and hearty laughter; the usual cards hanging above the alleys, designating the names of the bowling teams; and the usual array of tall, short, fat, and lean Bloatarians standing about.

He hung up his coat, feeling his usual sense of embarrassment at the red garters which Mrs. Finknodle insisted he wear around his shirt sleeves, and moved over to a table where the Bloatarians were being assigned to their alleys for the evening.

A huge, beefy Bloatarian sat at the table picking the teams and announcing the handicaps for the bowlers. Others stood around, seeing who was to bowl with whom.

Finknodle made his way through the loiterers and faced the beefy Bloatarian at the table. He held out his hand in the lodge grip, feeling like several sorts of fool, and forcing himself to say,

"Hello, Brother."

The "Brother" seized his hand in a crushing grip.

"Brother Finknodle," he beamed, "glad to see you!" The fact that this scene had occurred, without the slightest variance, for the past six years, once a week during bowling season, didn't seem to alter the red-faced man's enthusiasm.

"Let's see," said the beefy Bloatarian, "you want to know what alley your team bowls on, don't you?" He studied the chart in front of him.

Finknodle wanted to scream,

"No, you beefy baboon, I want to buy six tickets to Timbucktoo. I've mistaken these alleys for a steamship company!" But instead, he replied, "Yes, Brother."

There was murmuring from those around the table, and as Finknodle stood there nervously twitching his moustache, he realized that the usual weekly problem of why-did-we-take-Finknodle was under consideration. No one wanted him, inasmuch as he was as accurate on the alleys as a blind man trying to hit a fly-on-a-wall with a peashooter.

After what seemed an eternity, the beefy Bloatarian looked up. "The Hepcats are on alley ten tonight," he said.

Ten minutes later, Ferdinand Finknodle was resignedly waiting his turn to bowl. The other members of his team had rolled their first frames, and as the pinboy set them up again, Finknodle, holding his bowling ball like a red hot pumpkin, prepared to send one down the alley.

Awkwardly, scarcely able to bear up

under the weight of the ball, Finknodle lurched forward, his thin arm swinging the bowling ball in a crazy half-arc behind him. Closing his eyes, he let it fly, expecting to hear the familiar clatter as it bounced uselessly down the gutter.

He fell flat on his face two inches from the foul line. Fell flat on his face, as an amazing sound reached his ears. He'd hit the pins!

And as he picked himself up, scarcely hearing the wild cries of surprise from his teammates, his jaw dropped open in astonishment. Somehow, in some fashion, Ferdinand Finknodle had knocked down every last pin. He'd made a strike!

Which was the start of a wild, impossible, incredible evening. For, while the confusion mounted higher and higher, and the other teams stopped bowling to stand gawking foolishly around the Hepcats' alley—Ferdinand Finknodle rolled three perfect games!

PEOPLE were pounding Finknodle on the back. Screaming, shouting congratulations, and slapping him until he thought he'd collapse. Bewilderedly, grinning foolishly, he was almost able to feel a comradely warmth for his fellow Bloatarians.

Somehow, against their protests, he was able to force his way out of the smoky torpid atmosphere of the bowling alleys, able to emerge after twenty minutes of wild festivities into the cool night air.

Finknodle wanted to walk, wanted to cool off, wanted to think this thing out. He had skillfully evaded offers of fellow lodge members to see him home, and was now walking slowly along the boulevards alone, oblivious to the sounds of traffic, to the streams of people who passed him.

Finknodle was nobody's fool. He was quite aware that something terribly odd, wonderfully strange, had happened to him. Just what it was, he wasn't certain. But such a staggering reversal of fortune in his drab, uncomfortable existence was indication enough that he was emerging into a new Era. Why, he could even feel it: in the air he breathed; in the new, strangely confident spring to his step.

For the better part of his life, he had been living in the drab gray surroundings that one sees in newsreels in a movie house. And now it was just as if the newsreels had ceased, and he lived in a world of glorious technicolor.

Finknodle knew that a perfect game on a bowling alley had been achieved before. Numerous bowlers had done so, and any fairly good bowler had a slight chance of doing so. But Finknodle had not been a good bowler. He hadn't even been average. Lousy would have been a flattering word to describe his game.

So Finknodle, not being an *utter* fool, realized that something other than mere chance was responsible for this drastic reversal.

"But what?" Finknodle asked himself, halting there on the boulevard. "What?"

He could find no answer, so bewilderedly, he turned his steps in the direction of his house. After all, he reflected, perhaps he had reached a sudden zenith in existence, had the one peak moment of glory which philosophers declare comes to every person sometime during the span of life.

The thought made Finknodle rather sick. If he had had his Moment Supreme, it would mean that, from now on, his life would be on the downgrade. Finknodle shuddered to think that there could be such a thing as a downgrade to the life he'd been living.

Besides, if there were such a thing

as a Supreme Moment, he hated to think that he had wasted it, drained it, on the Bloatarian's bowling alleys. There were many other things he would rather have done with his Supreme Moment.

Things involving Mrs. Finknodle.

For, although Finknodle's life had been an utterly futile thing, he had cherished, like every other mortal, certain wonderful dreams. It was with such thoughts that he at last turned up the walk to his house.

FINKNODLE entered his house, noticing subconsciously that the lights were off, which meant that Mrs. Finknodle was already upstairs and asleep. He noted, subconsciously too, that his hat once again landed neatly on the hall peg when he sailed it toward the hatrack.

But these were matters of small moment, for Finknodle was still engrossed in those perfect games at the bowling alley, in their possible significance. Slowly, he made his way upstairs, a troubled frown on his brow.

It was a matter of small moment, too, for Finknodle to realize that his ten year old serge suit and his eight year old mauve pajamas had become slightly smaller, as he changed from one to the other.

"Probably shrinking," he mused, "from sheer senility."

Then, padding into his own dingy little room, a cloister which Mrs. Finknodle liked to refer to as his "den," Finknodle stretched out on his hard cot. But his eyes didn't close instantly. As a matter of fact, they remained open for fully three hours. Three hours in which Finknodle grappled furiously and futilely with the strange enigma of the bowling alley and the perfect games.

At last, however, Finknodle slept.

"BRRRRRRRR, brrrrrrrr, brrrrrrrr!" Finknodle came out of his slumber with a wild start, his hand darting out to choke off the rattle of his alarm clock. Looking at the clock, he saw that it was morning. Time to be rising. Time to go to work. Time to—

Finknodle rubbed the sleep from his eyes. Rubbed and stretched. Even as he extended his arms luxuriously, he heard the rending of cheap cotton material, and knew that his mauve pajamas were no longer intact.

"Damn!" he muttered, knowing that here was something else for which Mrs. Finknodle would give him hell. Sleepily, then, he rolled out of bed and shuffled morosely to the bathroom. With every step, he could feel the mauve pajamas rending a bit more.

His mind was still foggy from his interrupted slumber, but he sensed that there was something important on which he had been musing before shaking hands with the sandman. For the life of him, he couldn't recall what it was.

Finknodle was in the bathroom now, and his hand had turned the washbowl faucet. Washbowl —wash, bowl—that was it, Bowl! Excitedly, Finknodle recalled his perfect games of the night before.

The old excitement returned to him. He, Ferdinand Finknodle had rolled three perfect games! He, Finknodle, a mousey little guy with pale eyes, thin shoulders, and a scraggly moustache.

"But I did," Finknodle told himself, "I really did!"

And he switched on the bathroom light for better vision, bending over the washbowl to peer into the mirror.

"Let's have a look at the man who rolled three perfect games," he muttered.

Finknodle blinked into the mirror.

Blinked, from long habit, rather sheepishly. Finknodle blinked and then gurgled. Gurgled in a horribly strangled fashion, while his jaw fell open aghast.

Staring out at Finknodle from the mirror was a stranger!

Wildly, F. Finknodle grabbed the sides of the washbowl for support, closing his eyes in sharp horror. Then he opened them swiftly again for another peek. The stranger was still there!

"Who are you?" he rasped hoarsely, and the figure in the mirror moved its lips in the same words.

Frantically, Finknodle shot one hand to his face. The stranger in the mirror did likewise. Finknodle opened his mouth. The stranger did the same.

"Who are you?" Finknodle whispered hoarsely again. And again the stranger's lips moved in the same words.

It was then, as the incredible Truth began to dawn on him, that Ferdy Finknodle had the courage to look down at his own body. A strong, clean-limbed, muscular, powerful body!

"No!" Finknodle gasped, face gone ashen. "No!"

He glanced again into the mirror. Glanced at the face of the stranger. A face gone ashen.

Finknodle could evade the truth no longer.

"Something has happened," he muttered huskily. "Something impossible, incredible, utterly preposterous. *I have changed completely!*"

For the skimpy Finknodle chassis existed no longer. The pale, tired, Finknodle features were no more. Instead, Ferdinand Finknodle was now in possession of a physically perfect body, a lithe, powerful physique.

Another glance into the mirror told him that the transition hadn't stopped with his physique. His features, too, were utterly changed. The moustache was still there, true enough, but it was no longer a moth-eaten apologetic thing. It was straight, crisp, and debonair—as any good moustache should be. The rest of his features, from his straight, perfectly moulded nose to his strong, clean jawline—were magnificently handsome!

Finknodle reeled.

THIS was impossible. Overnight, in the space of a few hours, this incredible transition had occurred. He realized now why his clothes had seemed smaller as he was changing for bed, why his pajamas had ripped asunder as he tried to stretch on rising. The transition had been going on even as he went to sleep.

It was not every day in the week that Ferdinand Finknodle whipped about exchanging old bodies for new. Consequently it was a matter of many minutes before he could adjust himself sufficiently to the change to enable himself to move.

Finknodle stepped back from the mirror, surveying himself in growing fascination. The horror of the thing, the shock of the change, was rapidly dissipating before a new sensation, a feeling of joyous, wild, wonderful elation.

"I am physically perfect," he muttered again and again. Never, even in the advertisements for gentlemen's underwear, had Finknodle seen such a magnificent body, such a handsome mug, as the body and mug he now possessed.

He plucked off the remnants of the tattered mauve pajamas. Pajamas which had been good enough to conceal the old Finknodle, but were now utterly insufficient for the new.

His trousers were hanging on a hook over the bathroom door, and he knew,

as he looked at them, that they'd never fit. Neither would any other of his clothes. Of necessity, therefore, he grabbed a turkish towel and draped it sarong-like around his body.

"Ferdinand Finknodle!" The voice came piercingly to his ears, and he realized that Mrs. Finknodle had risen, was descending on him.

"What do you mean by letting your alarm clock ring until it woke me up, you whelp?" Mrs. Finknodle's voice demanded, drawing nearer.

"I'm sorry, dear," Finknodle began instinctively. Then he suddenly smiled, remembering his new body. Mrs. Finknodle, he was morally certain, would forget her anger at the sight of the wonderful transition in her mate. He smiled, a shy, proud smile.

"Hurry, Dear," entreated Ferdinand Finknodle. "I can't wait until you see me!"

Finknodle had modesty. Even though clad decently enough in his turkish towel, he didn't believe in dashing out into the hall to meet his wife. So he waited serenely, as Mrs. Finknodle's slippered feet shuffled nearer and nearer.

"What on earth are you talking about? Have you gone stark, rav—" Mrs. Finknodle's head appeared around the edge of the bathroom door, then her slatternly-clad person. She stopped short, her eyes taking in the sight of the superbly handsome masculine figure facing her. A moustached, smiling, splendidly muscled fellow—clad only in a turkish towel.

"Hello, Dear," Ferdinand Finknodle began.

Mrs. Finknodle's scream would have drowned out the blast of the Queen Mary's fog horn. It was a scream that ended in a series of bleating shrieks.

"Ferdinand! Ferdinand! Help! Help! There's a MAAAAAAAN in the bathroom. Ferdinand! Police! Ferdinand! Ferdinaaaaaaaand!" Mrs. Finknodle's feet took her racing away from the vicinity of the bathroom, and Ferdinand Finknodle could hear them pounding helter-skelter down the stairs to the first floor. He heard, too, the sound of the telephone being yanked off the hook, and the sound of his wife's excited voice screeching to the operator on the other end of the wire. Screeching something or other about the police.

"Perhaps," Finknodle mused, "I should have broken it to her a bit more gently." For it came to him that his spouse couldn't have been expected to recognize him, at least without a word or two of quiet explanation.

Finknodle was starting out of the bathroom, with a view to following his wife downstairs, to make the thing clear, when he stopped abruptly, paling. He suddenly realized that it was going to take much more than a mere word or two of explanation.

And Mrs. Finknodle was calling the police!

THE vision of himself in a bath towel, standing in a crowded police court, trying to explain to all and sundry that he had changed bodies, was a dash of cold water in the face of Finknodle's hope.

The thing presented entirely too many complications. And even as he was aware of this, it also dawned on Finknodle that he was going to have a hell of a time trying to get *anyone* to believe him. *He* knew that his body had changed, because he was still Ferdinand Finknodle, handsome or scrawny. Nothing could alter that.

But that didn't mean that others would be able to tell.

Momentarily smothered was Finknodle's elation at his new physical per-

fection. Smothered in the urgency of the dawning realization that flight was definitely necessary.

Finknodle clutched at his pants, still hanging on the hook above the bathroom door, then remembered that they wouldn't begin to fit. None of his other clothes would fit, either. Frantically, Finknodle drew the bath towel closer around his new body.

Flight was one thing. But flight in a bath towel was decidedly another. What to do? Flee pell-mell through the streets in a bath towel, looking like a refugee from a nudists' camp. Or take a chance with the police?

He could hear his wife still screeching hysterically downstairs. And then, in the distance, he heard the sound that ignited the spark of sudden decision. Police sirens. Dozens of them, wailing wildly, and drawing nearer and nearer to the house.

Finknodle acted. He grabbed his wallet from the bathroom shelf and, still hanging frantically on to his towel with the other hand, dashed madly for the rear staircase.

He was down the stairs in an instant; then out into the back yard; out into the murky gray light of early morning. Finknodle dashed through the yard and out of the gate leading into the alley.

Glancing swiftly right and left, he decided to run in the latter direction. Finknodle was in full flight. A hunted thing in a bath towel.

A LESSER mortal than Ferdinand Finknodle would have been somewhat perturbed by the prospect of having to dash willy-nilly along crowded thoroughfares, clad in nothing more than a turkish towel. The Finknodle of twenty-four hours before would definitely have quailed at such a venture.

But it was a totally changed Finknodle who raced rabbit-like through the alley in an effort to escape the police summoned by his hysterical spouse. Finknodle was growing aware that he not only had a new body—he was also becoming imbued with a viewpoint totally different from that of the night before, of the years before, too.

To begin with, towel or no towel, Finknodle felt no shame. His flight had been prompted by the necessity of avoiding the police, and now, as he scurried around a turn in a winding alleyway, he realized that the first flush of pride he had felt on the realization that he had a perfect body was becoming an overpowering sense of vast assurance.

Finknodle's fleeing steps slowed to a leisurely walk.

"My," he thought aloud, "this is odd. Quite odd. I feel utterly splendid. I feel perfect." He knew that these sensations shouldn't be so. He was well aware that a sense of vast assurance, utter calm, does not usually assail a man who is sauntering quietly about a city in a bath towel.

Ferdinand's brain told him this much, but his emotions refused to respond to his mind. He still felt calm, assured, perfect. He had a feeling of utter well-being, absolute detachment. Finknodle smiled, a smug, complacent smile.

"Don't know why my mind keeps worrying," he remarked, "everything is dandy. Just dandy.

"I was only trying to show her," he added. "She needn't have been so touchy."

He shook his head sadly.

"After all," he mused, "She should have been pleased with me, inasmuch as I'm perfect." At this reflection, Finknodle stopped abruptly. Perfect? Of course he was perfect! All this time, he had been taking it for granted. This was the first occasion on which he actually gave thought to his state.

Just as it was occurring to Finknodle to wonder about the circumstances and cause of his strange transition, the answer to it all came quite effortlessly to his mind. He knew.

"Gottschalk's machine, of course," he told himself utterly matter-of-factly. "The old goof actually *did* have a perfection machine in his basement. That accounts for the hat peg incident, the perfect games, my new body," he said aloud.

"I'm quite perfect," he repeated. "I should be surprised about it, greatly concerned. But I guess that, because I *am* perfect, I can't get very worked up over the oddity of it."

Finknodle sighed.

"It's a bit of a shame. I'm perfect, but because I *know* I'm perfect, and because I *am* perfect, I can't get a bang out of it."

Then, again, his sense of hurt at his treatment by Mrs. Finknodle returned to him.

"That was no way for her to act," he brooded aloud. "I was only trying to show her."

Suddenly Finknodle halted. Only trying to please her. Of course he'd only been trying to please her. She was ungrateful. He'd come up on her too suddenly, startled her, hadn't given her time to see that he had been right. But what was one ungrateful wife when there was the entire world waiting to be helped?

"Why, of course," Finknodle gasped. "I have the entire world to help!"

He suddenly felt a vast, all encompassing feeling of pity. Pity that gathered the entire universe, and all its shoddy imperfections, under the kindly wing of Ferdinand Finknodle.

"Poor fools," Finknodle muttered softly. "I must help them. I must see to it that they reap the benefits of my perfection. Why," the idea was instantly thrilling, "I can lead the world to a new era!"

Finknodle looked down at himself.

"But not," he conceded, "in a bath towel. I must go among them as one of them. I must have clothes."

Even as he spoke, he spied a well-muscled fellow in a gray tweed suit closing the doors of his garage, some forty feet down the alley. Finknodle smiled.

"I must have clothes," he repeated, his eyes mentally noticing a decided similarity in size.

FOUR minutes later, rubbing the knuckles of his left hand, Finknodle emerged from the alley onto a boulevard. He was clad in a gray tweed suit, and smiling faintly as he thought of the well-muscled chap lying in the alley, clad in a bath towel.

Tiny thrills of excitement raced up and down Finknodle's spine as he stepped out on the boulevard. Excitement prompted by the thought that he was about to begin the creation of a new order, a vastly different era, an age of perfection. He hadn't any particular plan. As a matter of fact, he wasn't quite certain where he would begin his campaign.

"I'll just start in," he told himself. "I'll just start in, that's all."

He was closer to the business district of the city, now, and the sidewalk on which he found himself was much more crowded than the previous one. The streets, too, were jammed twice as thickly with cars, trucks, and trolleys.

Sensations of acute pity assailed him. Sensations prompted by the incredible army of imperfections which stood out all around him. But an expression of benign tolerance broke out on his face, and he shook his head. Once he got started, once his leadership asserted itself, things would all be different.

"This is going to mean work," he told himself, happily, "but it's certainly going to be worth it."

Finknodle was moving along with the surge of struggling humanity on the sidewalk. Moving along and thinking, looking for some opportunity to get started, some significant keynote on which to start his campaign.

He found an opportunity.

He became aware of it gradually, as the sharp, insistent blasting and tooting of horns—a sound which had been vaguely disturbing to him from the moment he stepped onto the street—became louder and angrier in his ears.

There was the sharp shrill blast of a traffic whistle.

The shrill blast of a traffic whistle, followed by a steadily mounting wave of noise. Noise from trucks, automobiles, and vehicles of every description. The din of tooting horns was mounting to deafening proportions as Finknodle, frowning perplexedly, looked over the heads of the crowded sidewalk.

At an intersection directly in front of him, Finknodle saw the cause for it all. A traffic snarl. A snarl of such proportions that it had the intersection's stream of traffic completely bottled.

Looking swiftly around all corners of the intersection, he saw that cars were jamming along all four streets, in all directions, for as far as he could see. In the center of the intersection, red-faced, angrily bewildered, and freely perspiring, was a beefy traffic cop. He was glaring wildly around between blasts on his whistle, and waving his arms this way and that.

"The futility of them all," Finknodle murmured pityingly. "It's so typical of their entire existence."

He smiled. Here was his chance.

RAPIDLY, Finknodle began to push through the crowds around him, toward the corner. Somehow, he forced his way to the curb. Then he was out into the street, edging around the automobiles stalled uselessly there, heading for the cement safety island in the middle of the intersection. The safety island on which the beefy, red-faced traffic cop was standing.

The blasting of horns was mounting far down all streets leading to the intersections, and Finknodle made his way through all this until at last he reached the safety island.

The traffic cop had seen his approach, was glaring at him as he stepped onto the island. Finknodle smiled at him. Reassuringly.

"It's all right, old chap," Finknodle shouted above the noise and confusion. "I'll untangle this thing for you!"

"Git back where yuh belong!" the traffic cop bellowed at him.

Finknodle was moving over to him, holding up his hand reprovingly.

"Tut, tut," he shouted, "contain yourself, Officer. I've only come to help."

Then, looking swiftly around at the snarl stretching on all four sides of him, Finknodle let the photographic impression of the jam register on his mind for an instant. An instant later, and its solution was crystal clear.

Finknodle turned to the cop, who was descending menacingly down on him.

"Look . . . " Ferdinand began.

"Git back where yuh belong, or I'll have yuh in jail!" the representative of law and order shouted hoarsely. His face was streaming sweat, and he waved his arms wildly.

The clamor of horns grew louder.

"Hold on," Finknodle screamed above the noise. "I can help you out of this. If you'll just tell the maroon roadster on the right," he indicated one of the cars in the snarl, "to move forward three feet."

"Sooooo," the cop yelled, "yuh're tryin' to tell me my business are yuh? Up here interfering with law and order and jamming up traffic." Obviously, from the expression that crossed the face of the sweating officer, he had suddenly hit upon the idea of blaming his mess on Finknodle. "I oughta arrest yez," he thundered, grabbing Finknodle by the arm. "Everything was getting along fine until yuh come up here to ball things up!"

The noise from the tooting horns and bellowing motorists grew to bedlam. The grip of the beefy paw on Finknodle's arm tightened.

"I think I will arrest yuh!" screamed the now frantic cop.

Ferdinand tore his arm free from the cop's grasp. Then he waved a hand at the maroon roadster he had indicated before, beckoning it to move toward the island. Motor roaring it started forward.

The cop went berserk, wheeling on his heel frantically, waving his arms in all directions.

"Stop!" he screamed. Then: "Go!"

Finknodle felt a surge of vast impatience. He saw the button for the red and green traffic light system. He pushed it, knowing that his act would unsnarl the jam.

Motors roared, as the stream to which Finknodle had given the "Go" signal moved forward. Other motors roared, as a second stream, acting on the cop's gesture, moved forward also. There was a crash a split second later, as four cars, meeting next to the island, locked fenders.

FROM that instant on, all previous confusion seemed like placid serenity. Motorists were leaping out of cars, the cop was shrilling his whistle between frantic bellows and efforts to grab Finknodle. The horns of cars further back in the jam took up the incessant blare. Four or five of the motorists were approaching the island. They, too, were waving their arms and storming. The expressions on their faces struck Finknodle as being extremely hostile.

"Get that guy!" shouted one of the motorists, a huge, lumbering truck driver.

"Knock his teeth out!" suggested another, wearing a cab driver's cap.

"Egad, gentlemen," screamed a third, a pompously dressed rotund, little man who looked like a cartoon of a business tycoon. "He's probably one of those blasted reds. I'll swear he's a radical!"

The cop was grabbing at Finknodle's arm again, and the look in his eye was exceedingly unpleasant. Finknodle saw all this in a glance. The panorama of confusion, noise, anger, and a growing menace. He saw all this, and decided then and there that it might be the better part of valor to get out of there.

"Get him!" the truck driver thundered. "Jest hold him fer a second, and I'll teach him to muddle t'ings up!"

"Damned red, r o t t e n radical," shrilled the little business tycoon. "He's probably one of those fifth columnists. No, I'll bet he's even a *sixth* or *seventh* columnist!"

Finknodle looked wildly around for an avenue of escape. Bitterness and indignation were replacing the feelings of kindly pity he had had less than ten minutes before. Once again he had tried to help, once again he *could easily* have helped, and once again he was being driven to flight.

Finknodle leaped from the island.

"Get him!" screamed the cop.

"Rotten radical. Why doesn't he go to Union Square to muddle things up? That's where his ilk belong!" the business tycoon screeched indignantly.

Those were the last words Finknodle heard. Zigzagging through the melee of snarled automobiles, he ran for safety.

BREATHLESS and sick at heart, Ferdinand Finknodle moved sorrowfully along a quiet little side street at the edge of the business district a half hour later. He was only faintly aware that he had again outdistanced his pursuers with no trouble. He was only faintly aware of his clever escape, for he was brooding.

"I tried to help," he muttered. "I could have helped. Oh, those fools, those utter fools. They act like they don't want to be helped!"

He saw his rosy dream of a New Era slipping away from him. He saw the picture of Finknodle, The Deliverer growing fainter and fainter until it was a wan shadow.

He could have stood their stupidity, their utter ignorance, for Finknodle realized that they were all, unlike himself, imperfect creatures. But ingratitude and hate had not been what he'd bargained for.

"Union Square," he muttered. "Telling me to go to Union Square, the hangout of crackpots and radicals and wildmen! The nerve of the stupid little fool!"

Finknodle shook his head sorrowfully. Then, abruptly, he paused. Union Square. The hangout of crackpots, loafers, men with nothing to do but sit about arguing over Utopia. A light broke forth on Finknodle's features.

"Why not?" he asked himself. "Why not?"

It was instantly apparent to him that there was no reason in the world why he shouldn't go there. Any cause needs followers. That was what had been wrong with the Finknodle Cause. He had had no followers. He'd been silly enough to try to push it through alone. The men in Union Square might be bums, some of them, dreamers, others, but they would listen. They would listen, and provide the nucleus of a following.

Finknodle smiled.

"Why," he said, "I should have gone there in the first place!"

UNION Square, when Finknodle arrived there some twenty minutes later, was in full session. Around the bandstand in the circular little park were at least four speeches started. Soapbox orators were holding forth before groups of idle listeners. Finknodle swept in the scene with a beatific gaze. Here was his Mecca.

Approaching one of the soapbox groups, Finknodle heard the orator, a wild-eyed, wild-haired man, declaim,

"And soooo, my distinguished friends, we find that there is nothing right in the world. Down with Capital, down with Labor, down with Aristocracy, down with the Masses!"

There was a sprinkling of applause, a few murmured comments through the crowd. The orator opened his mouth to continue.

"I agree with you," Finknodle shouted, "about nothing being right in the world. Nothing *is* right, but you can't down everything. It all needs to be changed, that's all."

The wild-eyed orator glared at Finknodle.

"You're all wet," he snarled. "Whatever you said, you're all wet."

Heads were turning to look at Finknodle, and taking advantage of the attention, he elbowed his way through the crowd to the front of the soapbox.

"I'm right," he declared loudly, looking at the orator with scorn. "I'm right and I can prove it!"

"Let him talk," someone shouted.

"Naw," screamed another, "let the

new comrade talk!"

There was an instant babble of voices. Some screaming for the orator, others for Finknodle. It seemed like the start of a riot. Finknodle solved it, gently pushing the orator from his soapbox, and ascending it himself. The orator started to protest, but the babble of voices drowned him out.

"Quiet!" Finknodle shouted from his perch on the box, "Quiet!"

The babble subdued somewhat. Subdued enough to permit Finknodle to begin. And at the conclusion of his first few sentences, the noise stopped completely. Finknodle had the floor. Or to be more correct, the soapbox.

It had been instantly apparent to Ferdinand, from the moment that he stepped onto the soapbox, that this was his golden opportunity, his big chance. Inside his mind there burned a fire, a message. Here on this box, before a motley assembly of crackpots, he would deliver his Keynote to Perfection. As certainly as red was crimson, Finknodle had the perfect solution to the ills of the world.

It was so clear, so utterly simple. And as Finknodle talked on, he wondered why no one had ever thought of it before, why the brains and energy of the world had never hit upon it until now. It was vast, tremendous in its scope, and utterly, beautifully simple.

And as Finknodle talked, the crowd grew hushed. Grew hushed, while the groups around the other three orators in the Square joined the gathering around Finknodle.

FINKNODLE talked on, face shining, eyes glowing. He was expounding the innermost secrets of the Universe. Expounding them in terms as simple as childish nursery rhymes. He was so enthralled with his own words, so wrapped up in the message he delivered, that he forgot the crowd around him, forgot everything except the words that came effortlessly from his lips.

He was so enthralled, in fact, that he didn't notice the start of the murmuring after he'd been talking ten minutes. Didn't notice that the silence of the crowd had been a shocked silence, a stupefied silence. But now the murmuring was growing, was continuing to grow.

"Why," breathed a wild-eyed, long-haired little crackpot in the crowd, "the fellow's a radical. A crackpot. I've never heard such blasphemous anarchy, and I'm an anarchist myself!"

Then someone shouted.

"The guy's a nut!" Instantly there were other voices, shrill, wild, protesting, growing in volume.

"Knock him down!" someone yelled. "Knock him down, he's a radical!"

Ferdinand Finknodle was so engrossed that he didn't hear the voices. He talked on—until a brick caught him in the side of the face!

Ferdinand regained awareness as he tumbled backward off the soapbox. Regained awareness like a man jarred out of a dream by a kick in the stomach. All around him was bedlam. Shouting voices, cursing gasps, fists colliding with faces. A riot was in progress.

Foggily, through the dizziness of the blow by the brick, he realized that he was lying on the lawn. Realized, too, that feet were kicking at him, hands ripping at his clothing, that others in the park were clubbing anyone and everyone.

Dazed, bloody, thoroughly shaken, Finknodle crawled forward on his hands and knees. Subconsciously, over his pain and bewilderment, he realized sickly that he had failed again. The bandstand loomed up before him, and Finknodle crawled underneath its protecting shell. Crawled underneath and lay there

dazedly, watching the battle going on in the Square. The cut above his eyes made it difficult to see, so he closed them against the pain and hurt and confusion that streamed everywhere around him.

"I've failed, failed utterly," he told himself again and again. "Fools, all of them fools. They don't want to know. They don't give a damn about knowing!"

The physical pain which Finknodle felt was nothing compared to the burning ache in his chest. He was perfect. He was in possession of the knowledge that would lead them all to utter happiness. But the world, he was now certain, wanted nothing of him. Perfection would be tolerated only by perfection.

A strange expression crept over his face. Finknodle knew what he would have to do. He crawled to the far side of the bandstand, just as he heard the sirens of police riot squads drawing up on the park. He knew what would have to be done. And he was going to do it.

EXACTLY two hours later, Finknodle climbed the steps of his tiny bungalow. He looked at the green shutters and the door with the brass knocker, and sighed, thinking of how much had happened since he'd left the place less than ten hours before. He sighed, then his jaw tightened in determination, and he pushed the bell.

The door opened, and the face of Mrs. Finknodle peeked out. Peeked out, then screamed in horror. But Ferdinand Finknodle had stepped in swiftly. Stepped in swiftly and planted his hand across the mouth of his wife.

"Get as excited as you please," he muttered. "It won't do you any good."

"Umghskey!" gurgled Mrs. Finknodle.

Using his handkerchief as a gag, and his belt as a rope, he had his wife quickly trussed up in the next several moments. Then, carrying her in his arms, Finknodle marched through his house, pausing at the bathroom to get a bottle of pills, then out the back door. In another minute he was at the basement door of Doctor Gottschalk, his scientific neighbor.

There was no answer to his knock on the door, so Finknodle stepped back and kicked it in. Then, still carrying his wife, he entered the laboratory of the man who had made him perfect. There in the corner was Gottschalk's machine. A note on the laboratory table said:

"Herr Gottschalk is not in. Signed: Herr Gottschalk."

Finknodle smiled grimly at this.

Depositing his wife on the floor, Finknodle walked over to the machine. The machinations of the thing were perfectly clear to him now, and in an instant he had repaired the damage he'd done to it just the night before. A moment later, and Finknodle had placed his wife in a chair before the machine. Placed her in exactly the same position as Gottschalk had placed him.

Finknodle smiled as Mrs. Finknodle struggled. Then he turned on the juice.

FINKNODLE was back in his own house ten minutes later. Back in his own house, sitting at the telephone. Mrs. Finknodle lay sleeping on the couch in the living room. Sleeping from the effects of the insomnia pills which Finknodle had forced down her throat after he'd taken her from Gottschalk's basement. He had remembered that sleep had been necessary before he'd become physically, as well as mentally, perfect. Mrs. Finknodle was getting that sleep.

"Perfection and perfection alone can

tolerate perfection," mused Finknodle, dialing a number on the telephone. "In a short while I'll have a perfect mate."

Then, with streamlined efficiency, Finknodle went to work on the telephone. He called his bank. He called several investment houses. He called a taxicab company. He called a firm which sold boats, and after a short argument, purchased a small power boat.

"I'll want the boat in an hour," Finknodle demanded. "In the water. Gassed, ready to go." He paused. "And, of course, with supplies."

Hanging up, Finknodle dialed another number. He hummed softly, waiting while the telephone buzzed at the other end of the wire.

"Hello," he said, as a voice answered. "This is Finknodle. Have the messengers been started?" He paused. "Yes, I'll sign all the close-outs on my bonds and deposits. No. It isn't a question of lack of confidence in your bank. I just need money. All I have. I'm leaving town." He hung up again.

Finknodle walked over to his wife, looking fondly at her slumbering form. She was already changing. He smiled. This was splendid. To the devil with all others. Once he had his perfect mate—

The doorbell rang. It was a cabbie.

"Wait outside," Finknodle instructed him. "I'll want you to take my wife and me to Pier 7 in a half hour or so."

After that, the doorbell rang incessantly. Messengers with securities which Finknodle signed for. The bank cashier, with a sheaf of notes. The man from the boat company, to whom Finknodle gave the cash delivered by the bank. All these and many more came and went while Finknodle smiled and signed things.

HIS plan was simple. All his savings, every rotten penny which Mrs. Finknodle had hoarded for them all these years, even the house they lived in, he was turning into cash. Enough cash to buy the boat. A boat which would take him, and his perfect mate, to a tiny island in the Bahamas. An island where they could live untroubled by the imperfections of the world for the rest of their lives. Money wouldn't be necessary there. For everything would be perfect, just as Nature is perfect.

"We'll get away from it all," Finknodle exulted, "and live perfectly amid the perfection of Nature." He grinned. This burning of all bridges was fun. He'd seen to it that there were only enough supplies and gas in the power launch to take them to the island. After that, they could destroy the boat, and all last traces of imperfect civilization.

In half an hour Finknodle had a small pile of bonds and securities stacked neatly on the floor of the living room. All the leftover cash. He smiled wryly, thinking of what poor, dribbling investments these things had been. If he'd known then—

Finknodle looked at his wife. She was still sleeping. But she was no longer the small, thin, waspish, red-nosed shrew. The new Mrs. Finknodle, he saw, was going to be a creature of sheer delight. Quite perfect. Finknodle grinned again, and struck a match.

The pile of securities and bonds in the middle of the floor went up in a puff of flame, as Finknodle put the match beneath them. To Finknodle, it was beautifully symbolic. He bent over, and lifted his wife gently from the couch. Then, with one last glance at the burning pile of papers on the living room floor, he opened the door and stepped out of the house.

"Buddy," said the cab driver, as Finknodle, carrying his wife in his arms, stepped into the cab. "Buddy," re-

peated the driver, "I don't want to cause you no alarm, but I think your house is on fire."

Finknodle looked back at his home. Black columns of smoke were pouring from the window. He saw, too, that orange flames licking out from the side of the building would soon spread to Doctor Gottschalk's house. He smiled. It was a good idea to have the machine destroyed also. Besides, the place was over-insured, and the old crackpot would be glad to see it burn.

"Let 'er burn!" Finknodle chortled happily. Then: "On to Pier Seven!"

The driver shrugged and threw the cab into gear.

THE sun was warm on Finknodle's face as he leaned beside the wheel of the little power launch. Warm and pleasant. Especially pleasant, as he contemplated the joys of a perfect spouse. Mrs. Finknodle was still asleep from the pills. But she should be waking any moment. Finknodle had placed her tenderly in a bunk in the cabin below.

Finknodle grinned and stretched. Life was at peak. Behind him were the horrors of his previous existence. Past and gone forever. Never again would he hear the shrill voice of Mrs. Finknodle screaming—

"FErrrrrrrrDINaaaaaaaaND!" The cry came from the companionway leading down to the cabin, the cabin where Mrs. Finknodle had been quietly slumbering. "FERRRRRDINAAAAND!"

Something went cold inside Finknodle's chest. He knew that voice. Only too well did he know it. Footsteps were ascending the cabin companionway, and Finknodle's eyes fixed in horrified presentment on the door. He gulped.

The door opened, and Mrs. Finknodle stepped on deck.

"Ferdinand Finknodle," began his better half, "what's the meaning of this?"

Finknodle fought for words. Fought for words and fought for sanity. Something was definitely out of line. Mrs. Finknodle was just as he had expected her to be. A physically perfect, utterly magnificent specimen of a woman. But the look in her eye. And the tone of her voice—those belonged to the old wife, the old Mrs. Finknodle!

"We're both perfect," Finknodle said in a quavering voice. "We're both perfect, dear. I hope."

Mrs. Finknodle put exquisite hands on her breathlessly beautiful hips, and glared at Ferdinand balefully.

"*I'm* perfect," she amended. "I'm perfect all right. But look at *you!*"

Finknodle looked at himself. He was still the same magnificent physical masterpiece. He blinked bewilderedly.

"So . . . so . . . so am I!" he bleated indignantly.

"That," declared his wife, "is what *you* think!" She shook her beautiful head. "Boy, what a mess. There's plenty to be done with you!"

And then it dawned on Ferdinand Finknodle. Obviously, there was one part of his spouse which hadn't changed —her disposition. Her *perfectly* rotten disposition!

He opened his mouth to speak, then snapped it shut again, his eyes traveling over the new Mrs. Finknodle. She might still have the disposition of a persecuted boa constrictor, but, boy, what a chassis. What wonderful compensations she possessed!

Finknodle smiled, a slow, complacent smile. A smile touched with a good deal of speculation, and an infinite amount of satisfaction. Let her go to work on him. He was perfectly content. And it was every woman's right —and delight—perfect or not, to remake her husband.

The THRONE

DETAIN SUSPECTED SPIES

New York, March 15.—(National Press) Lord Aldington Beatty, Britain's famous Spitfire ace, and Baron Manfred von Rasch, dreaded Nazi flyer, who disappeared exactly one week ago while fighting a prearranged duel high above the English Channel, are safe on the French island of St. Pierre, off the coast of Newfoundland, according to exclusive information just received.

How Beatty and Rasch made the perilous ocean flight, 2500 miles from their Channel duel, is an unexplained mystery. The French government at Vichy has clamped down a strict censorship, but it is learned that both airmen will be interned for the duration of the war.

The mystery is heightened by the fact that at the time of their disappearance, Lord Beatty and Baron Rausch had fuel for no more than a half hour of flight.

Naval Reserves Called Up Fo
Will Remain 'for Duration'

Washington, D. C., June 12 (AP)—The navy announced today that all enlisted men of the naval reserve called to active duty

by

ARTHUR T. HARRIS

"HE has accepted! The greatest air duel of the war will be fought out between the two greatest fighters of the war! We will witness the spectacle at last. Think of it! He has accepted the challenge!"

The Nazi officer was jubilant. Commandant's office, operations room, the great barracks and even the huge kitchen vibrated with the

# of VALHALLA

It was a gentleman's fight—between Nazi leader and Tommy ace. But they didn't expect to fight in Valhalla!

Soft, but strong arms caught them up, soared with them ever aloft

knowledge. "That *verdammt* English puppy, Lord Beatty, dares to match his clumsy acrobatics with the superb skill of our own Baron von Rasch at two o'clock this afternoon over the Channel!"

Least excited warbird in the great secret airdrome in occupied France was the Nazis' premier ace. Twenty-six years old, blond, blue-eyed, arrogantly handsome, Manfred von Rasch sipped cognac with his *Staffel* mates and from time to time glanced at his gold wristwatch—a personal gift of the *Fuehrer*.

"A half hour," he rasped, as his flight command nodded with excited gestures. "In a half hour I take to the skies to shoot down that English dog! The nerve of the scoundrel—accepting my challenge! I thought he would go into hiding at the very sight of me.

"But no. He wants to fight! Very well, then. I will pursue him until he is exhausted from the chase. Then I will give him one burst of my machine guns through the cockpit! *Kaput!* He will go down with a hundred pounds of lead in his belly!"

"Ja!" screamed von Rasch's flight mates in ecstatic approval. "Death to the British *schweinhund!"*

ABOUT ONE HUNDRED ten miles away, on the outskirts of London, a dark, chubby-faced young man tossed restlessly between blankets.

He was having dreams. And most un-English dreams at that. The night before, Lord Aldington Beatty had gone into London with some Yankee friends attached to the American Eagle Squadron.

Things had got off to a proper start at a little dive in the Limehouse section. The warbirds, primed for fun, had dropped around for some ale. One ale led to some Scotch. Five Scotches had led to a bevy of ex-chorus girls, hurriedly summoned by the proprietor.

Lord Beatty had wound up in a cheap movie house, with the most awful head and the most frightful cries shrieking in his ears. He managed to get an eye open. His palms began to sweat. Scared stiff, he grabbed the arms of his seat.

A huge gorilla was racing along a tree limb, headed straight in his direction. Behind the gorilla swung a magnificently muscled man who seemed to be shouting something, in a voice halfway between an air-raid siren and the scream of falling bombs.

"Help!" gulped Lord Aldington Beatty in a small, strangled screech.

And then he passed out again.

Horrid remnants of the night before still paraded before his sleep-drugged brain, as he fought the blankets and the huge gorilla, now more fang-toothed than ever . . .

"Hey!" young Beatty spluttered. "What the hell—"

His plump small body squirmed away from the pool of cold water. Lord Beatty hung for a breathless moment on the edge of his cot, and toppled over on the floor. He got up slowly disentangling himself from his bedclothes.

He was getting peeved; in fact, mad. First a naked, murderous gorilla. And now Bill Kline, his American buddy, standing over him with an empty water bucket in his hamlike fists.

"Ha, ha!" Kline roared. "One look at you and Hitler would laugh himself to death!"

Beatty rubbed ruefully at a certain portion of his anatomy, which had borne the brunt of his fall out of bed.

"I say, old man, but I'm damned if I can see the humor in the situation. I'll catch my death of cold!" He shivered.

"Oh, yeah?" Kline, six feet two, and two hundred pounds of solid meat,

picked up the bantam ace in one hand, ran with him along the row of cots, and deposited the protesting Beatty in the shower room.

He turned on the faucet. Ice cold water doused the unhappy Britisher.

"Ub-glub!" choked the chubby young aristocrat. "I'll tie you to a London lamp-post. German dive-bombers will get you the first clear day!"

ONE hour later, there was no fun in Bill Kline's eagle eyes. He grabbed the now fully dressed Lord Beatty about the scruff of his neck, but he did not shake the chubby warbird, except that his own hand was a trifle unsteady.

"You little punk!" Kline snarled. "If you're not back here in ten minutes, I'll break you up in little pieces!"

Lord Beatty wiggled from under his grasp. He looked a moment at the tall, tough Yank with wide, slightly troubled brown eyes.

"It's part of the game, Bill," he said softly. "If anything should happen—well . . ." He coughed, and buckled down his flying helmet. "Well, just hang around Mother for a few days. She'll take it kind of hard, you know."

Then he was gone, his short legs carrying him resolutely across the tarmac. No officials, no mechanics were standing about.

Somehow, they had understood he wanted to take off alone. He looked back for a moment at Bill Kline, a quick affectionate glance, and then jumped into the sleek red Spitfire.

He gunned the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, nodded with automatic approval. He wound forward the cockpit cover, then, and shoved the throttle full ahead.

The Spitfire soared into the air like a bright stabbing sword.

CHAPTER II

Return of Odin

AS though the gods themselves stood by with impartial mien, the rough Channel wind died away in a long protesting sigh. Sun streaming through the sky's immeasurable vault burned away the mists.

At two o'clock, Spitfire and Messerschmitt locked in battle ten thousand feet above the Dover Straits. They came together like two sleek, nimble fencers, the one seeking to maneuver the other so that the sun blanked out his vision.

There was no snarl of machine guns; all was deathly still, as Lord Beatty and Baron von Rasch circled warily about each other, performing a breathless series of darting maneuvers and dives.

Modern fighter ships are so swift that a duel even between aces is a virtual impossibility. In half the bat of an eyelash, planes cutting across each other's machine-gun sights may be several miles apart, they are that fast.

"Schwein!" roared von Rasch over his intercommunicator radiophone. "I dare you to come close enough for a real fight!"

The radio sets in both machines, by prearrangement, had been adjusted to the same wavelength. Von Rasch had insisted on this point. It had been his boast that he would drive the Englishman into the Channel, force him to cry quits.

"I'm sorry, old man," Beatty drawled. "It can't be done, you know. We're fencing at nearly four hundred miles per hour."

"Bah!" snorted the German. "You are not only a poor flyer, you are a coward!"

Beatty squirmed angrily in his

teddy-bear suit. Hot blood mounted furiously to his face. Mouth set like a steel trap, he snapped off the radiophone switch—and hurtled his Spitfire straight at the dancing Messerschmitt.

Von Rasch, catching the red streak through his sights, felt the hair rise on his neck. Never before had any Allied warbird—British, Polish, Free French, Norwegian, Belgian—flung such a brazen challenge at Hitler's premier sky vulture.

Like the expert airman he was, von Rasch held his fire. Like a stab of doom, Beatty hurtled toward him, his finger on the electric gun-trip. The Nazi began to sweat. No coward, his cold nerve could not quite wait out the Englishman's implacable thrust.

Tight clamped von Rasch's finger. A cone of lead lanced toward the Spitfire, passed it by. Except for one single bullet. It ricocheted against the cockpit cover, lanced through and dug a long, ugly gash in Beatty's thigh.

An involuntary scream of pain was wrenched from his lips. But not before his eight Browning machine guns had converged on the Messerschmitt's tail. Not before a slashing scythe of lead had smashed through the air, to sever von Rasch's aileron controls as though they were violin strings.

THERE was silence, then; taut silence while the German fought to keep his stricken ship on even keel, as he worked frantically to head it toward the French coast. Unable to maneuver, he would bail out as soon as there was reasonable chance for him to descend on dry land.

Beatty flew about him in circles, careful to avoid the Nazi's still intact machine guns. But the Englishman's circles became less adroit, less skillful, as the red-hot pain in his thigh threatened to blank out his senses.

"You scum," he said in a low bitter voice over the radiophone. "You got me with an explosive bullet. I ought to shoot you down like the dog you are. Now head for the English coast, or I'll blow your brains out!"

Von Rasch gasped with alarm. But not with fear.

"*Gott behüt*—God forbid!" he choked. "But believe me, *meinherr*, you must be mistaken. I am a man of honor. I do not use such things as explosive bullets against even my worst enemy! I would rather die than to so disgrace myself!"

"Hmph!" snorted Beatty. "I think you are lying. Now make for England, or—"

"But you are wrong!" von Rasch cried, even as he got his faltering ship headed back toward Dover. "The ground crew loaded my machine-gun belts; that is their regular duty. One of them dishonored himself by this cowardly act.

"Please, *meinherr*, when you have taken me prisoner, will you permit me to contact my *Staffel?* I have the authority to order a full investigation. The guilty man will be shot! I—"

"*Au revoir*, my friend," Beatty murmured weakly. He groaned in pain. "I believe—I—am—going to—pass out—"

The next second, the horrified Nazi saw his mortal enemy's Spitfire stagger in mid-air, as though stopped by a concrete wall. It began to spin, then; first in tight little circles, then in wide, fatal concentric arcs, until it was like a red top gone berserk.

Choking, von Rasch fought the controls of his own doomed ship, chose to follow his foe down to the chill waters beneath, rather than make for land and a safe parachute descent.

Down, down hurtled both ships. Frantically the Nazi shouted over his

radiophone, to summon aid from the British coastal patrol. They were a thousand feet above the icy waves now —a thousand feet from total oblivion.

And then a strange thing happened. A thing so extraordinary, so sudden, so wholly without reason that Manfred von Rasch thought he was already dead, and must be in Heaven.

A VISION materialized out of the swirling sky. A gorgeous vision, with long blond hair and eyes the deep blue of a Norwegian fjord. Gowned she was in flowing white garments, with a silver band about her head and soft sandals upon her feet.

Gently she placed her hands upon the heavy gloves of the Nazi ace. Straight into his eyes she stared, and her look was an unspoken command. With an involuntary shudder, born of the utter weirdness of this fantastic apparition, von Rasch loosed his grip on the controls and slumped back with a muttered gasp.

Straightway the Messerschmitt began to rise. Perspiration crawling wetly over his taut body, the German stared with trembling lips at his gossamer companion. She smiled, a golden smile, and nodded with flashing eyes at something beyond the cockpit.

Beside them rode young Beatty, his head resting in the arms of a sister maiden. Side by side flew the two planes, as though in dauntless formation, heading high for the blue vault of heaven, the pilot of one unconscious, the other dreading to believe the inescapable sight before his eyes.

Of a sudden an urgent voice in Oxford English came through von Rasch's headphones.

"I say, there, Beatty, what goes on? We saw you clearly enough through our field glasses a couple moments ago, and now you're headed toward Heaven with the Nazi at your side. It doesn't make sense, you know. What happened, old man . . ."

And then, in sharp anxious German: "Von Rasch! *Was ist los?* First the Englishman goes into a spin, then he comes out of it, and you fly away together! Is the *verdammt* English pig using a secret weapon? Answer, von Rasch! *Mach schnell* . . ."

The baron stared helplessly overside. Down, down there thousands of feet below, on the French coast, worried Nazi observers were straining their eyes through Zeiss glasses.

It would do them no good, he thought. He was in the grip of gentle, all-powerful forces the like of which no man had ever dreamed. He never thought to answer through the microphone just below his lips. The *Luftwaffe* would think him gone mad . . .

EVER higher the two planes rose, now above the final layer of clouds, now into the stratosphere itself. Von Rasch experienced difficulty in breathing, hurriedly turned on his oxygen valve. Then he remembered, and jerked his head so that he could stare into the other ship.

Young Beatty's head still lolled unconsciously in the arms of his golden rescuer. Sweating, von Rasch made frantic motions in pantomime with his hands. The maiden, eyeing him intently, at last caught on. She found Beatty's oxygen valve and gave it a twist, in the nick of time to ease his pounding heart.

So blue a sky the Nazi baron had never seen. It was as though a giant fan had washed all the heavens clean of the minutest speck of dust. Messerschmitt and Spitfire engines had long run out of fuel. The silence was profound, as deep as the depth of history.

Emotionally and physically ex-

hausted, von Rasch slept.

When he awoke, it was with a start and then an explosive gasp of sheer amazement. The planes were approaching a great marble city, stretching endlessly in all directions, and up to the very roof of infinity.

There were great palaces, marvelous buildings in every quarter. As the ships drew closer, the German could make out great outdoor stadiums, where strong, nearly naked blond men wrestled and boxed, while attendants and fair maidens cheered on their partisans.

The visitors from Earth, their fighter planes mysteriously guided by an outside hand, landed moments later on a great green field, lush with grass and carpeted from one point to another with gorgeous flowers.

It might have been Mount Olympus itself, the home of the Greek gods of classic antiquity. But this was not Greek mythology, von Rasch, a university graduate, saw at a glance. This was more nearly the home of the Norse gods—patron saints of the Vikings of old!

His eyes large with wonder, von Rasch scarcely knew what he was doing as he followed the maiden who had rescued him from the Channel. Together the little party of four, young Beatty still unconscious and in the other maiden's arms, headed through an arch in the stadium and along a wide, magnificently paved highway toward a great high temple, more pretentious than all the rest.

"Gladsheim!" the German gasped, as they drew near. "It could be no other place! Gladsheim—the Temple of Joy. We are in Asgard, the realm of the ancient Norse gods!"

HIS eyes were round as saucers; no longer were his lips implanted with the sneer of a Junker aristocrat. Here, incredible, but as alive as his beating heart, stood the finest temple since time began.

The roof was all of gold, and in front of the edifice was the grove Glasir, whose trees were seen to bear a golden fruit. A long-fanged wolf was hung before the entrance, the symbol of war, and above the wolf sat a great bald eagle, gloating over its conquest.

Von Rasch's maiden nodded with smiling eyes. All four, Beatty still tenderly carried, proceeded through the great archway and into a surpassingly huge hall.

"Valhalla!" the Nazi exclaimed. "The Hall of the Fallen in Battle!"

Magnificently ornamented shields hung before his eyes in every direction. Long, marvelously carved spears served as a brilliant frieze on all the walls. Shining swords presented a dazzling illumination. All about were great doors, large as the one through which the little group had entered.

At the end of the gigantic pantheon, there rested a great carved throne. A superbly built warrior, proud as the Vikings of old, motioned imperiously for the four to come ahead.

His powerful body was draped in the skin of a wild beast. Blue were his proud hawk-eyes, fair his complexion and great locks of hair. Beside him were his prize stallion, Sleipner, an eight-footed steed, fleet as the wind; his spear, Gugner, and on his finger his treasured ring, Draupner.

He stood up, presently, as von Rasch's heart pounded with incredulous awe. The great warrior glanced for a moment at chubby young Beatty, now beginning to stir in his maiden's arms. The helmets of both warbirds had been removed; nor was the air other than sweet and pure.

The Norse god extended his arms in a proud gesture.

"Welcome," he intoned. "Welcome to Valhalla. I, Odin, chief of all the Northern gods, give you greeting. My two faithful Valkyries have served me well. They have brought you back from the very jaws of death, to continue your brave struggle until all eternity." *

CHAPTER III

The Eternal Fight

YOUNG Beatty came to with an amazed start. Feeling altogether whole, and knowing perfectly well that his thigh had been torn to pieces, he glanced at the limb, only to find it in tiptop shape.

True, there was a long thin gash from knee to hip, but somehow it had knitted skillfully together. Then he noticed, at first almost casually, that he was almost divest of clothing, and that soft gentle hands were massaging his body.

"Well," thought Beatty, shaking the cobwebs out of his brain, "I supposed a trawler picked me up. But how in hell that wound healed—"

He looked up, puzzled, and beheld a magnificent young maiden, her palms slick with oil, as she was about to knead his chest. This brought a healthy flush to his cheeks, for even under the best circumstances, young Beatty was not disposed to display himself unduly in such scanty attire.

This was all right, however, he supposed, though his face and neck turned scarlet. Nurses were trained in Swedish massage for invalid patients, were they not? A sudden thought struck him, and he decided to make certain. Briefly, he took a good look.

By the three-horned owl, here was no nurse! Here was a gorgeous young thing, with a band about her flaxen tresses which glinted now with gold, now with silver as the light struck it. Here was a girl gowned in the stately garments of Greek antiquity.

Greek? But the Greeks didn't practice Swedish massage.

"Omigod," Beatty moaned, covering his eyes with his forearm, "I am being manhandled by a Viking maiden!"

Baron Manfred von Rasch, on an adjoining table, raised his head languidly and began to grin.

"*Meinherr*," he drawled, "none of this makes any sense, I assure you. But our little duel apparently pleased Odin—or Wotan, as we Germans know him. He sent two lovely Valkyries to rescue us from the very waters of the English Channel."

Beatty sat bolt upright, perspiring hotly. His blond attendant frowned in perplexity.

"I say," Beatty chattered at her, and at von Rasch's Viking masseur, "this is all very odd; very odd, indeed! Can't you girls leave us two chaps alone for a bit?"

HIS attendant looked at von Rasch's. Both maidens nodded their heads slowly, as though to imply that the short, chubby warrior was surely mad. They left the chamber then, graceful as

* In the legend of the Norse gods, all Earthly battles were watched over by divine maidens, the Valkyries, who in the name of Odin ride through the skies to determine the outcome and to select brave warriors for Valhalla.

Each morning, as the cock crows, these valiant men-at-arms march forth to do furious battle with one another. At midday, all struggle ceases. Every wound is healed, and the heroes assemble for a great feast under Odin's paternal eye.

The saga of the Norse gods forms the basis for the Niebelungen Ring, the great music-dramas of Richard Wagner. Modern Nazi theory springs largely from the concept of these old pagan heroes, except that the Wagner interpretation is largely mock heroics—warriors without fear, quite unlike the average brave fighting man, who can suffer fear and take glory in his stride, all in the same day.—Ed.

young fawns, as the German watched them go with rueful eyes.

"Lord Beatty," he reproved the Englishman, "I am afraid your training was not quite as broad as ours. In Germany, under the Third Reich, one gets used to anything."

"Including Hitler?" Beatty shot back.

Von Rasch's fists clenched. He leaped from his rubbing table to confront the tense, defiant Englishman. The two glared at each other for a long moment. Then the Nazi reached out his hand and patted the other patronizingly on the shoulder.

"It is no use," he said cynically. "We are in Asgard, home of the Norse gods. What good does it do to squabble? Even if we struck one another, there could be no definite result.

"Up here," his eyes were almost mystical, "warriors are renewed in flesh and spirit after each battle."

Beatty brushed his hand aside.

"You are no coward," he said flatly. "Neither, at the moment, are you my enemy. But you are not, you will never be, my friend! We live in two worlds apart, von Rasch! No bridge can span the gap."

Young Beatty took a deep breath. He hated speeches.

"I propose to escape from Asgard, or Valhalla, or wherever the devil we now are," he said pointedly. His eyes gleamed with resolve. "I must get back to my squadron. You would return to your *Staffel*—if possible."

Von Rasch's eyes narrowed.

"I understand," he said shortly. "If possible, we will both escape, one helping the other. After that"—he shrugged—"after that, it is up to each man to prevent the other's return to active duty."

"Precisely." Beatty held out his hand. "At least you have a code of honor, von Rasch. On this one point—our escape—we agree."

They shook hands stiffly, as two boxers before a prizefight.

THAT night they slept, their bodies relaxed from the oil rubs, a long cool plunge in a crystal-clear pool, and a hearty supper.

Von Rasch was the first to drop off to sleep. The two warbirds lay on a deep warm bearskin, with a white brilliant moon streaming through their chamber. Sleep came slowly to young Beatty.

He studied his enemy's features. Softened by repose, they seemed now more the face of a healthy, vigorous young man, rather than the thin lips, flaring nostrils and calculating eyes of a killer.

Beatty remembered the vacation he had spent in Germany's Black Forest four summers before. He had been with a group of English schoolboys, as their leader. The Nazis had made a great fuss over them.

With great pride, too, they had pointed to their own youth movement, in which millions of boys played and worked in the sunlight, developing strong young bodies.

It had sickened Beatty, even then. All this outdoors air, this exercise, these wholesome, substantial meals added up to only one thing—*death*. These German boys were being developed, not to lead healthy, happy lives, but to go forth into battle in the peak of physical condition.

Thinking of these things, the English ace glanced again at his mortal foe. At another time in the world's turbulent history, they might have been the best of friends and companions. Now each was committed to a temporary truce. After that, the cold, heartless duel must be resumed until one or the other fell.

Somehow, Beatty thought as he dropped off to uneasy slumber, somehow, nothing made any sense at all.

A MAGNIFICENT glowing ball of red and gold, the sun crept agelessly into the heavens from the rim of the world's horizon.

In Asgard, home of the Norse gods, men stirred as the sun's first beams fell obliquely across their eyelids. Moments later, the shrill, penetrating crow of a rooster awoke the sleeping silence.

"I say," mumbled Lord Aldington Beatty, squinting crossly at dawn's glory, "this is a beastly time to wake a man up." He turned over on his side for a luxurious catnap.

Seconds afterward he woke up again to the sound of hearty masculine thumps. Von Rasch, shaking the sleep out of his eyes, was inhaling deep breaths and pounding at his chest with both fists.

"You're too damned healthy," young Beatty grumbled, as he got up reluctantly and began to stretch.

"Healthy enough to win from you today," von Rasch grinned coolly, as he flexed and unflexed his biceps. *"You* can't fight."

The two stood glaring at each other. Well they knew the legend of Valhalla. From now until high noon, each must fight the other, with every weapon at his command.

Beatty was about to swing at the tall, sneering German when their two blond attendants of the rubbing table and the bath came in to take charge.

With wide, red-lipped smiles they handed the two sky eagles identical animal skin loincloths. They waited expectantly. Beatty, glancing at his own skimpy nightdress, blushed a furious crimson.

"I say—we're not children, you know!" he protested. "Really, we can get these gadgets on without your help."

"Ja," grinned the Nazi reluctantly, "I suppose we could. *Heraus!* Come back in a few minutes."

The maidens eyed each other blankly. Beatty, redder than ever, grabbed them by either arm and hustled them out of the chamber. Then he ran back and fairly jumped into the offensive loin piece.

He stood up, trying to look himself over.

"Ridiculous!" Beatty decided. Short and chubby, he looked like an overgrown Cupie doll.

Von Rasch was something else again. He looked like a young Viking god. Broad shoulders, deep, powerful chest and lean, finely muscled limbs made him the very image of an athlete.

He glanced disdainfully at the stocky Britisher.

"You look like a bulldog," he sneered. "On its way to the sausage factory."

BEATTY'S short hairs bridled on the back of his neck. His brown eyes flamed with rage. Immediate hostilities were averted only by the uninvited reappearance of the golden-blond attendants.

They were impatient. Obviously, the two warbirds were holding up the parade. Englishman and German tightly clasped, the maidens hustled them along classic marble corridors into the great hall of Valhalla itself.

At the far end of the vast chamber, Odin himself supervised the preliminary arrangements. The two sky aces stared about them in awe. Warriors by the thousands, as though by mutual agreement, selected partners.

The choice was open as to the manner of the fight. Some chose spears; others took swords, sharp and cruel.

Still others elected to box or to wrestle.

Odin, peering through the great mass of eager combatants, finally found the gaping warbirds.

"Come to the front, sky warriors!" he thundered above the din.

All sound instantly ceased. The huge phalanx parted, to let the bewildered aces through. As they marched through the long ranks to the throne, the cold light of purpose kindled in von Rasch's eyes.

"Ho!" exclaimed Odin, when they had presented themselves. "You are late. Knew you not that you must struggle, one with the other, until high midday?"

"Ja, meinherr!" replied von Rasch, the instinctive opportunist. "But I wonder whether my opponent is equal to the task."

Odin checked young Beatty's bitter protest.

"Silence, warrior with the blond hair!" he roared at von Rasch. The German flushed. "Here, we are all equal, in courage if not in battle prowess. Choose your weapons!"

"My bare hands!" Beatty growled. "That's all!"

Von Rasch bowed superciliously.

"A brave gesture," he sneered, "when I am twice your size. I shall enjoy feeling your blood run across my knuckles."

Odin glared angrily at the Nazi.

"I am an impartial god," he swore. "But by the vault of Heaven, I hope the small man strangles you to death!"

CHAPTER IV

Recalled to Life

STILL the cock crowed, in a shrill challenge to make men's blood run the faster with anticipation. At a sudden command from Odin, the thousands upon thousands of warriors lined up before each of the five hundred forty great doors, eight hundred men abreast.

An instant of palpitant silence, broken only by the excited breathing of brave, powerful men. This instant they stood as though in immovable tableau. Swords flashed in the streaming sun; shields glinted forth a stolid defiance. Countless warriors, disdaining the tools of slaughter, wore only animal skins and hot, determined courage.

"Go forth!" Odin shouted. "Each contest to the better man!"

Thousands of men's feet, some sandaled, others bare, marched in rigid discipline through the great doors. A lush green battleground, stretching farther than the eye could see, circumscribed Valhalla's castle.

Each warrior and his opponent chose their own plot of ground. Those who were expert horsemen called loudly for their mounts. The golden-haired, everpresent maidens brought up the classic steeds with no delay.

It was like a medieval pageant, except that the rivals fought rather than hated. Here were the great fighting men of ages past; here were warriors who for centuries had challenged each other, once a day and every day, in near-mortal combat.

Spears sang through the air, to rebound off adroitly blocked shields. Time and again, swords bit home on glistening flesh, to dye the greensward red with spurting blood.

Utterly fascinated, participants in a mass struggle the likes of which no man of modern times had ever witnessed, young Beatty and von Rasch looked on with incredulous eyes.

The Nazi ace, inherently the more calculated, snapped to his senses first. He glanced at Beatty. The chubby Englishman, gaping in admiration at

the warriors' prowess, never noticed the movement.

Grinning coldly, the German reached over and slapped his opponent a stinging blow across the cheek. Beatty recoiled as though shot. Angrily he launched himself at the powerful blond flyer.

His short, pumping fists beat madly at the empty air. Von Rasch, with his long legs and his superior reach, was here, there and everywhere, all in the same moment, pausing only in rhythmic intervals to smash his smaller opponent about the face.

Splat! Young Beatty felt his pug nose give way. Blood spurted out the nostrils, to curl wetly about his lips and drool onto his naked breast. *Sock!* His right eye seemed to swell up and burst. *Bam!* A perfectly good ear one instant became a fleshy cauliflower the next.

"This," swore the bantam Britisher between loose, bloody teeth, "will never do!"

THROUGH narrowed, puffy lids he watched his chance. Von Rasch let go with a looping left jab. With churned-up momentum, Beatty dived inside the circle of his arm. He caught the Nazi about the legs, kept on going. Off balance, the German fell forward like a sapling before a hurricane. He landed flat on his face.

"Oof!" groaned the blond warbird, as the breath whooshed out of him.

"'Oof,' my Aunt Tillie!" young Beatty panted, as he slumped on top the Nazi and turned him over. "Here's one for the book!"

He cleared his throat and spat squarely in the other's eye.

With a bellow of rage, von Rasch thrashed about, yelling unprintable threats. Grim of eye, Beatty rode the bucking bronco that was his opponent. From time to time, he slapped the Nazi ace across the mouth, skillfully, stingingly.

At last von Rasch regained his breath. Feeling the rumbling volcano beneath his clamping leg hold, Beatty decided on a strategic retreat. One minute he was atop the German; the next minute, he had bounced free.

Von Rasch uncoiled like a striking rattlesnake and fairly shot to his feet. He came charging down on his smaller foe, breathing mayhem and torture, Gestapo style. He made good his boast. Like a kangaroo, he circled about the Britisher and then lunged out with his foot.

The blow caught young Beatty hard under the chin. He looped backward in a somersault and sprawled flat on his belly, stunned. Von Rasch fell upon him like a strangling octopus.

"Schweinhund!" he snarled. "Now it's my turn!"

He flopped the Englishman over on his back, sat on his chest and stabbed out a cruel hand. The forefinger dug into one eye; the thumb, the other. Von Rasch shoved mercilessly against the eyeballs, relentless, torturing strength flowing viciously from shoulder to fingertips.

Young Beatty screamed. He knew better than to plead for mercy, but he could not halt the shriek of anguish that tore from his lips. Von Rasch, in an ecstasy of torture, thinking his victim powerless, relaxed the pressure of his own body.

With a violent squirm, born of scalding pain and unspeakable rage, the English ace wriggled free. Before the surprised German could respond, Beatty had launched himself berserk at the other's neck.

His strong, short teeth sank into the Nazi's soft throat. A British bulldog, the pain in his eyes driving all thought

from his brain, Beatty's jaws clamped relentlessly as his teeth ground toward the jugular vein.

BLOOD began to seep through broken flesh. With the first taste of it, young Beatty shuddered through the length of his chubby body.

"You're an animal!" the thought bit through his maddened brain. "A low filthy animal!"

Half sobbing, he disengaged his jaws and buried his head in his arms, distraught. Von Rasch, drenched with the sweat of terror, his young Viking's body jerking in spasms, rolled over on his stomach and buried his chin and throat in the lush, reddened grass.

Moments later there came a great shout from a castle archway. At Odin's command, the thousands of fighters squinted at the sun, saw it was high noon, and on the instant ceased their violent combat. Exhausted warriors staggered each to his own chamber, to have his battered, bloody flesh renewed and made whole by Odin's incalculable magic.

Von Rasch still shuddered in the grass. Beatty reached over and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Don't be an ass," he snorted, still breathing heavily. "We can do this all over again tomorrow."

"Ach, *nein!*" gasped the Nazi, sitting up gingerly and feeling his lacerated throat. "Valhalla or no Valhalla, we escape tonight! I give you no more chance to eat me up alive!"

In spite of the searing pain through his eyeballs, young Beatty had to chuckle. A short, bitter laugh that was quite unlike him.

"You win," he told von Rasch, as each had to help the other to his feet. "One more day of this, and we'll be animals. Funny—I never thought of it that way, when we were taking potshots at each other over the Channel. Yet that's all we are, really."

Together they staggered from the great green field of ageless battle. At the edge of the castle, they were met by their golden-haired, fair-skinned Viking attendants. Moments later they were back in their own chamber.

Miraculously, as the maidens bathed them and anointed them with perfumed oils, their torn flesh became whole. Their hatred died apace. Dressed at last in cool flowing robes, in preparation for Odin's feast, both men had made up their minds to fight out their next duel on Earth.

CHAPTER V

The Crucial Test

AN UNDERCURRENT of animated comment, subdued but intense, gripped the whole vast Throne Room of Valhalla as young Beatty and Baron von Rasch entered the now improvised banquet hall.

The two airmen halted where their own attendant maidens had left them, embarrassed and thoroughly ill at ease. Both college men, the English warbird and the Nazi ace, piecing together the old Nordic phrases and strongly accented dialects, realized after a bit that the conversation concerned them.

Odin's sudden "Ho!" hushed the babble of low voices. From his thronelike chair at the head of the greatest banquet table, two beautiful golden maidens, gowns swirling about their lithe, rounded forms, sped to the bewildered flyers.

Eagerly they took their hands and escorted the aviators into Odin's presence. On either side of the Norse god were empty chairs. Staring self-consciously about them, Englishman and German took his seat.

They gazed upon Odin then, in deepest awe tinged with a crawling sensation of anxiety. He had only one eye*, they saw, now that they were this close. But his good eye, blue and piercing and amazingly shrewd, made up in its intense gaze for its mate.

"Silence!" roared Odin good-naturedly, and rose on his thick-thewed limbs. A veritable giant of a man, he could claim overlordship of both men and gods by dint of his great physical prowess, as well as his divine right.

"A toast!" Odin proclaimed. "A toast to our most recent guests! They fought together so fiercely this morning, I thought even my own miraculous healing powers would be of no avail!"

A great laugh went up from the warriors' midst. Odin was joking at his own expense. Well the heroes of Valhalla knew he could renew life even after bouts where death claimed the victim.

As for young Beatty and von Rasch, they thought of their eyes and their throats and were not so certain.

A Valkyrie, according to Viking tradition, placed a deep drinking horn in Beatty's hand, while her sister favored von Rasch with the same service. Then Freya, the incomparable goddess of love and beauty, herself poured the sacred mead into the gourds.

With a great sweeping gesture, Odin raised his horn to his lips and quaffed with deep sighs of satisfaction.

"Mud in your eye!" Beatty murmured, following suit.

"Skoal!" saluted the Nazi, doing likewise.

It was the choicest nectar of the gods. A fermented liqueur, this mead, made of water and honey, with malt and yeast added, in a Viking distillation which would remain a secret until the end of history.

Under its potent influence, British ace and Nazi sky hawk mellowed by the minute. Soon they were conversing not only with Odin, but with the fair-haired, eagle-eyed warriors seated nearby.

Thunderously Odin clapped his hands, the sound reechoing through Valhalla's vast chamber. With appreciative shouts, men ate bacon from the fabled boar Saehrimnir, and refreshed themselves now and again with beer and mead.

ALL through the great feast, Freya herself, loveliest of all the goddesses, was at great pains to see that Odin's honor guests were stuffed and then stuffed again with the choicest meats and drinks.

When it seemed that all must burst their gorged stomachs, Odin called imperiously for quiet. He rose again, a little unsteadily on his feet, to be sure, for had he not drunk more and eaten more tremendously than any warrior present?

Beatty and von Rasch, in high good humor, their brains swimming with the rich liquor fumes, came back to reality with a cold, anxious wrench almost at Odin's first words.

"Warriors!" he boomed. "This day we honor the first new guests in more than a thousand years. When I returned to power, many centuries after Ragnarok,* I determined to people Valhalla to its full capacity, at the earliest moment. I would leave only two last

* By drinking from Mimir's fountain, according to Norse mythology, Odin became the wisest of gods and men. But he won the distinction at the price of an eye.—Ed.

* Ragnarok—the "Twilight of the Gods." In Viking mythology, the final destruction of the world in the conflict between the Aesir (the twelve principal gods), and the giants and powers of Hel. In this titanic battle, Odin was killed. But in future time, his son, Balder would return to usher in a new golden age. Obviously Balder has accomplished this regeneration and reinstalled his father, Odin, on his throne.—Ed.

places. Instead of selecting warriors from every Earthly war that came along, I determined to select my full quota at the outset.

"My reason was clear enough. How can a god really enjoy himself if he must constantly be on the watch for new recruits? You brave men, the thousands of you who have been here for centuries past, are all old friends.

"You live and fight in the spirit of Valhalla. But new recruits must be trained. Let them stew in their own juices, I decided. Let me enjoy my exalted throne in undisturbed peace."

Odin paused to let his words bear full meaning. He quaffed a great gulp of mead, smacked his lips, and continued, as Beatty and von Rasch stared at him with wide, apprehensive eyes.

"The centuries went by. Bloody wars were fought all over the globe. There came the First World War—a frightful affair, believe me. I thought to honor the millions of brave men in that conflict by choosing two of their number.

"But I bided my time. There would be one more Earthly struggle, I decided. The first one only stirred up hatreds which another universal struggle must finally cope with. True enough, my prediction was terribly fulfilled.

"When the Second World War broke out, I called my faithful Valkyries back into service. For many, many days they cruised invisibly through the skies, waiting for that moment when a great personal duel between two champions should take place."

Dramatically Odin pointed with his great forefinger, first to Beatty, then to the Nazi ace.

"Yesterday, that duel was fought. As combat goes, it was over almost as soon as it had begun. But it was a thoroughly brave affair! Ever present was the possibility neither might survive."

Odin, ruler of Asgard, chiefest of all the Viking gods, signaled with his hand. All the vast assemblage of warriors rose to their feet. Brave fighters lifted drinking horns toward their lips.

"Welcome, warriors of the sky!" Odin proclaimed, nodding imperiously to Englishman and German. "Welcome to Valhalla!"

If they lived to eternity, Lord Beatty and Baron von Rasch knew with beating hearts as their eyes filled with tears, this was gloriously their own shining hour.

CHAPTER VI

Dream's End

THIS was a Dream World, young Beatty thought bitterly as he lay that night on the huge bearskin rug. Their heads still swimming from the liqueur they had drunk, British ace and Nazi foe had come back to rest after the classic banquet.

But not to sleep the just sleep of exhausted men-at-arms. Only to rest for a precious while, to relax for the last time in Valhalla among warriors who, unlike themselves, had no more battles to fight on Earth.

This night they must escape, both airmen had agreed. Von Rasch slept now, his breathing regular and untroubled. Beatty dozed intermittently, more imaginative, more sensitive, his subconscious mind seething with turmoil.

He lay presently with wide clear eyes, gazing at the brilliant display in the heavens. Bright and scintillating shone the moon, as myriads of stars danced attendance, glowing phosphorescently through the vast infinitude.

A long time Beatty lay awake, till that hour after midnight when all the sleeping world's energy is at its lowest ebb. Then with a bitter wrench, he

rose, stretched, and woke the slumbering von Rasch.

Together the two warbirds stole out into the open moonlight. But there was no one abroad. Valhalla, timeless as the cosmos, mounted no guard nor burrowed into the bowels of the earth, like wartorn cities in a blackout.

Ashamed of themselves, ashamed of carrying their man-made fears through the very citadels of Heaven, the two warbirds crept along moon-drenched paths until they came to the great highway which had first taken them to Valhalla.

Lush and fragrant in the cool night air lay the great field where their planes had so mysteriously landed. Spitfire and Messerschmitt rested where they had glided to earth. Under other circumstances, they might have remained so until the end of time.

"We'll have to use my ship," Beatty said tersely. "I shot off your aileron controls, remember? It would take too long to repair them, even if we had the tools."

Von Rasch considered.

"You are right. But have we enough fuel?"

"Oh, come now!" Beatty snapped impatiently. "That's the German in you, man. What difference does it make? The Lord only knows where we'll come out of the stratosphere. If we had a thousand gallons, it wouldn't make much difference."

The baron frowned.

"Yes," he admitted reluctantly. "If we emerge anywhere near land, it will be a miracle." Impulsively he gripped the other's arm. "Hold on! We haven't got a space ship, an interplanetary machine. This is just an airplane! When we hit Earth's heaviside layer, the friction will burn us alive!"

Beatty waved him into the Spitfire. "We'll have to take our chances. But I have an idea in the back of my mind. I've a hunch that it will work."

"*Lieber Gott!*" choked the German. "He has a ***hunch!***"

VON RASCH crawled back into the fuselage. He had to loosen a few wires to make room for himself. Cool as ice, young Beatty climbed in, adjusted the gasoline mixture, primed the ignition and pressed the started button.

The great Merlin engine coughed once, coughed twice, caught hold, died, then roared into life. Beatty let it warm up for a few moments. Then he maneuvered so that the nose pointed toward the North Star. He rammed home the throttle.

In seventy seconds, the Spitfire was hundreds of feet above the citadel of Asgard.

"*Au revoir,* Odin," the English ace murmured under the engine's roar. "I wish I could have said 'good-by'."

He leaned backward then and shouted to von Rasch,

"Control your breathing!"

In the next moment, he plugged up the hole in the cockpit cover made by von Rasch's ricocheting bullet. After that, it was the work of an instant to turn on the oxygen valve. The open helmet he had worn lay on the fuselage floor, with the precious life-gas streaming from the nose clamp.

Under this arrangement, both warbirds could breathe the oxygen intended for only one. Von Rasch, seeing Beatty's action, tapped the Englishman on the shoulder.

"I didn't ask you to do that!" he shouted. "It is your helmet. Put it on!"

"Forget it!" Beatty shouted back. "We agreed to stick together."

Those were the last words they spoke. In another instant, a terrific pull seemed to clutch at the thundering

Spitfire. The gravitational pull of Earth, young Beatty knew, drawing them violently back into its orbit.

How the Valkyries had defeated that tremendous drag was a question only they could answer. Beatty thought of this and of all the incredible events of the past thirty-six hours, as the Spitfire began to gyrate like a top, shuddering from nose to tail.

Straight as an arrow, then, it shot toward Earth, whose dim outlines were a hazy blur on the Englishman's swimming vision. Straight as an arrow the plane hurtled downward, and its two occupants spun unconsciously with it.

BEATTY came to with a splitting headache. The air was insufferably hot. His hands and feet still felt numbed; but his lungs were seared with fire.

Instinctively, his brain working on prearranged schedule, he caught hold of the joystick and jammed his feet on the rudder-bar pedals. With main strength, he fought to right the ship on an even keel, or at least on a broken angle, to escape somehow the Earthward plunge through the burning air.

Slowly, with heart-breaking delay, as the very rubber on the retractable landing gear scorched and sizzled, the Spitfire came out of its near-fatal spin. For thousands and thousands of feet, as he gulped painfully at the last stray remnants of oxygen inside, Beatty fought to bring the ship through and below the stratosphere.

He glanced at his altimeter finally. It remained stuck at its outermost limit. None of the other instruments, except those directly connected with the engine, seemed to be functioning. But the heat inside the Spitfire seemed to be lessening; *was* lessening!

"We made it!" he shouted weakly to von Rasch. "We're over the earth!"

The Nazi ace stirred. After a bit he got his eyes open. Blurred, they came back into focus with returning consciousness.

"We're all right?" he yelled up. And then a foolish look spread over his taut face.

"Why do we shout?" von Rasch demanded matter of factly. "The motor has stopped."

Beatty's mouth flew open, then closed in chagrin.

"Hell! Must have run out of petrol hours ago. I meant to switch off the engine back there, but—"

Von Rasch shook his head vigorously.

"Don't blame yourself. We were doomed from the first, my friend."

Day had set in again. A bleak, gray day, stormy and infinitely forbidding. Like a cork in a tub, the Spitfire tossed about in its silent descent, with the wind whistling ominously through the struts and the two men inside staring at each other with frank, frightened eyes.

THE clouds broke presently; broke over a turbulent expanse of sea some thousands of feet below. With a sinking heart, Beatty scanned every inch of the horizon. Doomed . . .

"Hey!" he shouted moments later, so abruptly that von Rasch, starting, bumped his head against the fuselage.

"Well?" the German demanded.

"Land! By the three-horned owl, land! Come on, you Spitfire!" the English ace prayed as he glued himself to the controls. "You're going to make that landing or bust!"

Minutes later, the Spitfire had made good. Beatty rubbed his eyes, unable to believe their good fortune. Von Rasch, cramped behind him in the fuselage, could only sit doubled up, sweating from every pore.

Beatty circled the island, set in the

midst of several others in the cruel, choppy sea. He swung back to the beach, as the Spitfire lost altitude, and came down to a hard, bouncing landing.

He sat in the pilot's seat for a long moment, pulling himself together. Then he wound back the cockpit cover and clambered out. Von Rasch, his face likewise pale and strained, was close behind him.

"Terra firma!" he breathed. "God, I didn't think it possible!"

It was cold, and they shivered. Come to think of it, Beatty realized after a moment, they still wore their Viking banquet robes. Beating his arms about his body to work up circulation, the young English ace wondered where they were, and how they could ever make a plausible explanation.

Well, obviously, they couldn't. Their adventure simply made no sense. No, better to cook up some sort of a story and—

Beatty didn't know when it happened. He didn't know anything at all. For a swift, flashing instant his brain seemed on fire. Then he collapsed into von Rasch's outstretched arms.

The Nazi warbird blew on split knuckles. Their bargain was up, wasn't it?

He picked up Beatty in his arms and began carrying him inland. He would leave him in some fisherman's cottage with a glib explanation; then steal some gasoline, refuel the Spitfire and take off.

THE first house he came to, a half hour later, sweating from the burden on his shoulder, was his last. Heavily Baron Manfred von Rasch knocked on the door.

It was opened suspiciously, by a man who was obviously not an English fisherman. With his first words, the Nazi sized him up as French, and stupid.

Von Rasch began to talk volubly, in bad French. The faster he talked, the narrower became the fisherman's eyes. After ten minutes, he put on a heavy mackinaw and showed the German to a bedroom. He brought out a rough towel, and then went out, slamming the door behind him.

The Frenchman returned in an hour. With him were a squad of gendarmerie, formidable, armed and highly suspicious. They marched without ceremony into the bedroom.

"*Mon ami!*" came a hearty young voice. "Come in!"

Lord Aldington Beatty sat up in bed.

"Where is your friend?" demanded the fisherman.

Beatty felt gingerly of his jaw.

"Trying to take my Spitfire off the beach, I suppose."

There were angry Gallic mutters.

"Oh, don't worry!" grinned the young English warbird. "What place is this?" he asked the head of the local police.

"St. Miquelon," snapped the cop. "Off the coast of Newfoundland. If you are a spy, you will be shot! And also your companion."

Beatty bounced out of bed, sweating.

"St. Miquelon! Then we crossed the Atlantic! We'll be interned for the duration! We—"

"Where," growled the menacing cop, grabbing the young ace by the arm, "is your friend?"

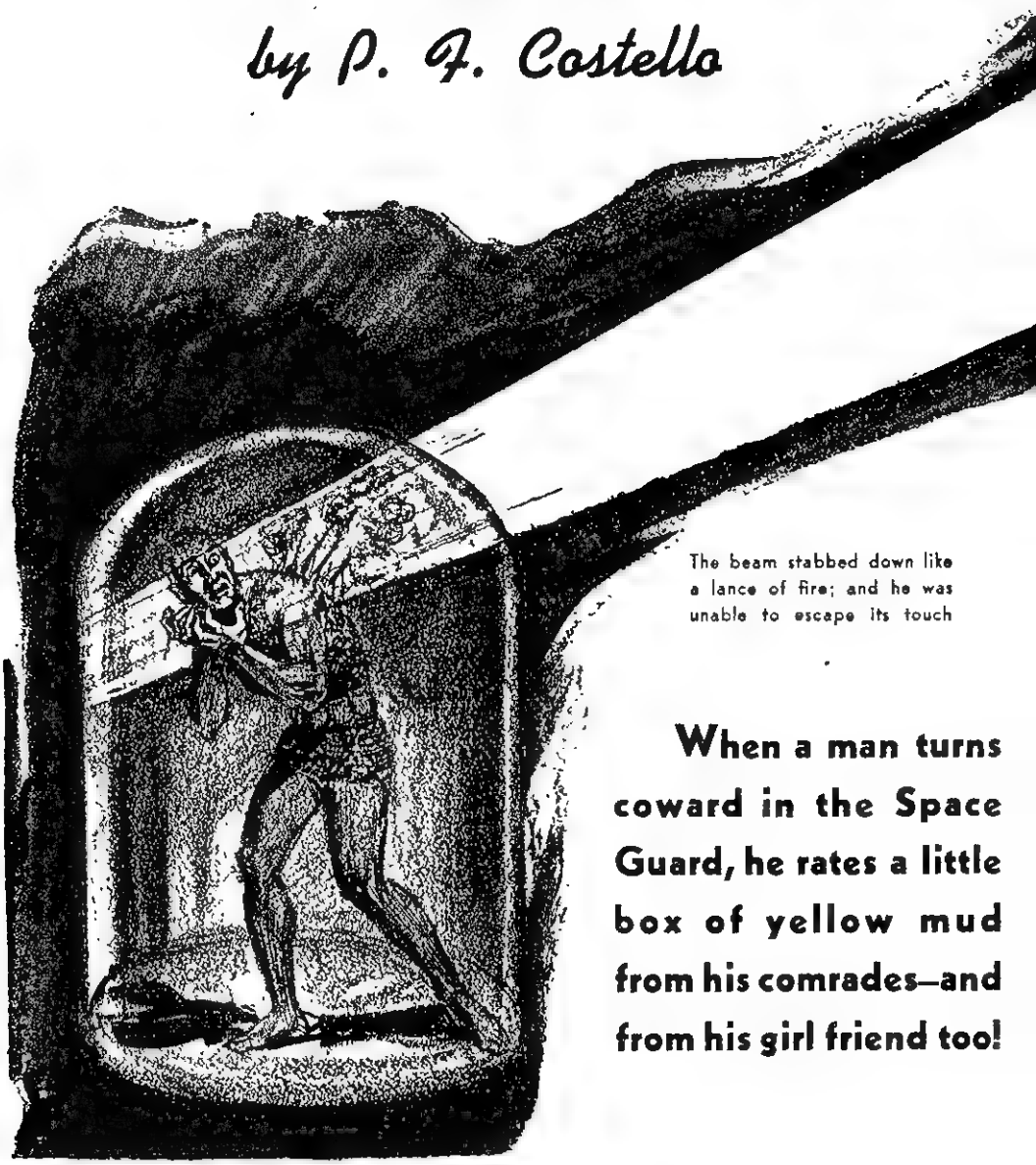
"Oh!" Beatty shrugged his arm free. "Why, I don't know, friend. Really I don't. Even if he found some petrol, he couldn't escape, you know."

Lord Aldington Beatty reached into a pocket of his robes and brought forth a length of narrow wire.

"Connected to the ignition switch, you know," he drawled. "Thought the fellow might try a getaway once we landed, so I yanked it loose when I got out of the ship. Not a bad idea, what?"

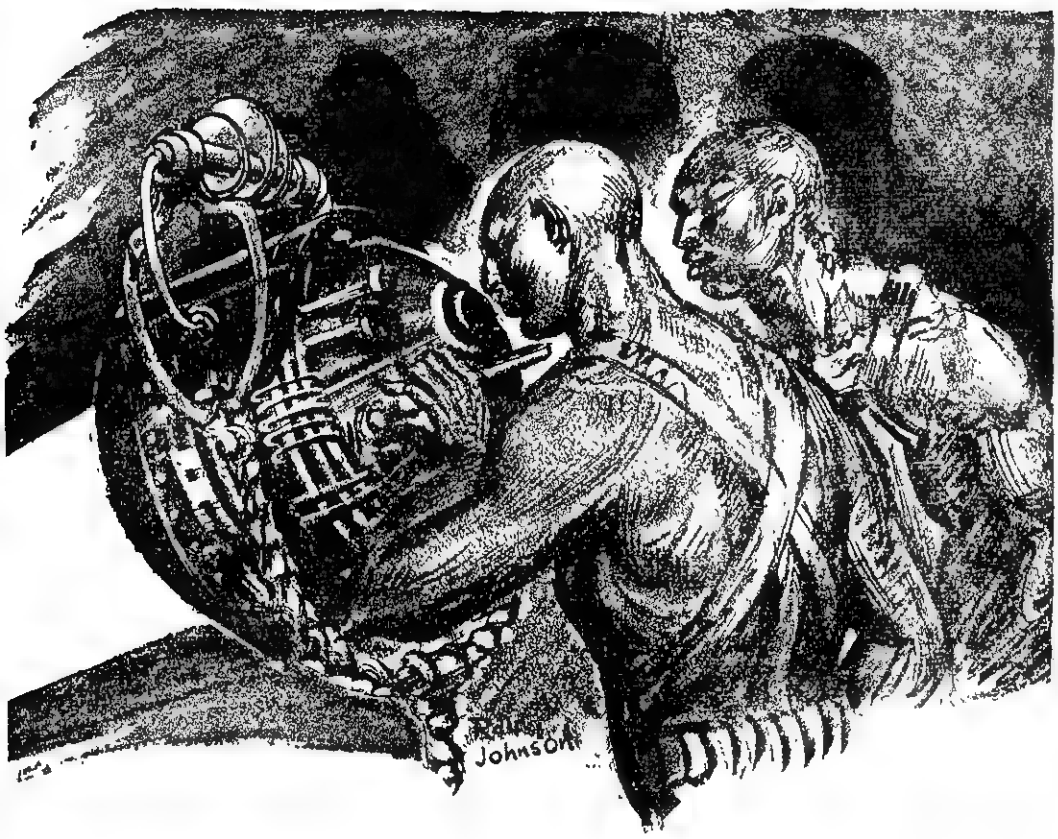
YELLOW MUD FOR COWARDS

by P. F. Costello



The beam stabbed down like a lance of fire; and he was unable to escape its touch

When a man turns coward in the Space Guard, he rates a little box of yellow mud from his comrades—and from his girl friend too!



TERRY MASON knew a sharp aching fear as the space ship he was piloting blasted into the combat range of the sleek black Martian craft. He was also aware that his co-pilot was regarding him curiously, almost expectantly; as if he were eager to see how the youngest of the renowned Masons would conduct himself in his first space battle. The fear in Mason's heart was like the grip of a cold hand, numbing his senses, catching his breath painfully in his throat.

Droplets of perspiration gathered on his forehead to course down his lean sensitive face and fall with a tiny splash on the floor of the ship. His right hand gripped the release lever of the forward atomic cannon until his knuckles strained whitely through the skin.

Terry's nerves were screaming with tension. With every fibre of his body he longed to whip his ship about and blast back to the comforting sanctuary of Earth-base MX. But he held his course, drawing closer and closer to the death-black Martian ship, which was growing larger and larger on the visi-screen.

"About ten minutes now," he said through stiff lips.

His co-pilot laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't worry about it," he said reassuringly. "Once you get into the thick of it you won't be able to think about anything else. A little nervousness is nothing to worry about. I'll bet your brother and even your father were a little queasy before their first space battle."

Terry Mason didn't reply. He

couldn't had he wished to. For his teeth were clenched tight to keep from chattering. He knew it was something more than nervousness, something more than temporary tension that gnawed at his stomach and turned his blood into streams of ice.

It was fear! Craven abject fear of space fighting and what might happen to him. No one knew or even suspected that Terry Mason—son of Space-Inspector Mason and brother of the legendary "Battering" Mason—was a miserable coward. The girl he loved, Eileen Manners, would have laughed at the thought, but Terry Mason himself, knew. This realization seared him shamefully, transformed his every waking instant into a hell of remorse.

Now, with his hand on the cannon release, hurtling toward the dead-black Martian fighter, he was going to meet a test that would settle the issue for all time.

"Easy, now," his co-pilot said quietly. "You'll be needing all the Mason skill in a few more minutes. Your dad and brother are watching from the visi-screen on MX. They want to be as proud of you as you are of them. In these times we need every space-fighter on the Earth-chain to be at his best. That new coordinator of Mars has his eye on MX and other spots on the Earth-chain if I'm not mistaken. If we let him bluff us he'll be at our throats without warning."

Terry Mason nodded miserably. Every brush with a Martian ship was of terrible importance these days. The Martian ships were hovering like buzzards over MX and other strategically important spots on the Earth-chain, ready to pounce the instant they detected a sign of indecision or weakness on the part of Earth-chain garrisons. It was a maneuver reminiscent of those long-gone days when Earth dictators massed troops on the borders of countries they coveted. History had shown the tragic results of submitting to this psychological terror. Garrisons of the Earth-chain were ready to the man to resist any attempt at annexation or invasion.

TERRY gripped the controls tighter in his hands as the Martian ship began a liesurely turn that brought its stubby, cannon-pocked nose to bear on the vulnerable side of the Earth ship.

"Swing over," the co-pilot said tensely. "It's lucky we aren't in range of his tommy cannons.* We'll get in range and then accelerate. It's the best tactic under the circumstances."

Terry swung the ship around slowly until its nose was pointed dead at the nose of the Martian ship. The palms of his hands were sticky with sweat and his heart was pounding heavily at his ribs. Fear was passing over his body in sickening shocks that he couldn't combat by any process of his will. The black nose of the enemy ship seemed to be pointed directly at him, to be boring hideously into his brain.

His co-pilot threw the acceleration lever and Terry could feel the sudden powerful surge of the ship as its reserve rockets blasted a song of power behind them. Terry's eyes swung to the visi-screen and glued there. They were hurtling head-on toward the Martian fighter which was looming larger and larger by the split-second.

Instinctively Terry shrank against the back of his seat. The Martian ship was moving at them with incredible speed and he could see now the tiny mouths of the atomic cannons, ringed around the nose of the onrushing ship. His breath was rasping against the lining of his throat and there was a dull

* Tommy cannons: A slang term for Atomic cannon.—Ed.

ache in his lungs.

"He's opened fire," the co-pilot said calmly. "We're out of range yet so he must be just testing."

Off to the right Terry could see flaming streaks of electron bullets hissing harmlessly through the void, missing his ship by several hundred yards. Something turned in his stomach. He had to grit his teeth to keep from retching. His skin whitened and then a green edge appeared at his mouth.

The Martian gunner was opening up now. Streaks of blazing death were hissing toward them in brilliant terrifying arcs, but the range was still long and the blasts were roaring beneath them. Terry shook his head and closed his eyes. From every pore in his body sweat was streaming, but his mouth and throat were as dry as brick dust.

He forced his eyes open again and looked at the visi-screen. The Martian ship was winging toward them like a huge black arrow, belching fire and death from all of her sixteen tommy guns. They were only seconds away from a head-on collision.

"Open fire!" the co-pilot snapped. "Enemy within dead center range."

Terry felt a wave of nausea and terror sweep over him. He jerked his gaze from the visi-screen and buried his head in his hands sobbing hysterically.

The co-pilot wheeled from the acceleration lever and grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him rougly.

"Fire," he commanded roughly. "Fire," his voice rose frenziedly. "*Fire!*" he screamed.

TERRY raised his eyes to the visi-screen. The monstrous Martian ship was almost upon them. It was a miracle that one of the dozens of atomic blasts had not already blasted them out of the void. For a split-instant, Terry Mason stared in horror at the nearing ship. Then, without reason, without conscious volition, his hand was reaching out —not for the cannon release —but for the control lever. His fingers closed over its hard handle and he shoved it forward. His ship plummeted down in a twisting spiral, running from the Martian.

He heard the co-pilot cursing wildly in his ear, felt his hands tearing at his arms, but he held the ship on the course back to MX. Now the visi-screen showed the big Martian ship wheeling and blasting after him, closing on his tail, tommy cannons roaring furiously.

Terry knew he was running like a whipped cur when he should be fighting to the end. But something stronger than reason was guiding his actions now. It was his blind nameless fear. He shoved the acceleration lever up to its last notch and tripped the general rocket release. His ship spurted forward under the new power like a thoroughbred leaving the post, and in a matter of seconds the Martian fighter was nothing but a black blur on the visi-screen and the mooring towers of MX were coming into view.

Dully, automatically Terry set the landing apparatus and slumped against the back of his seat. Realization of what he had done was crawling over him now in sickening force. He knew now that he was finished, washed up, not only with himself but with every one on MX. For courage was the one absolute quality a man must possess to gain the respect of a space garrison. And Terry Mason didn't have that quality. An anguished sob tore from his throat and he dropped his head on his arms.

The co-pilot's voice, caustic and contemptuous, cut across his senses like a lash.

"I didn't think I'd live to see a Mason

quit cold and run like a yellow cur. You've endangered the life of every man on MX with your cowardice, but you saved your own precious skin."

Terry lifted his head, faced the man. The contempt and scorn on the man's face was like a hard slap.

"I didn't think; I didn't even try to think," he said brokenly. "All I could see were those tommy cannons coming at me. Before I knew what I was doing I was running. Why didn't you shoot me?" he cried bitterly. "Why don't you shoot me now? I'm a coward, do y'hear? Shoot me, damn you, and get it over with."

The co-pilot shook his head slowly.

"Shooting's too good for you," he said icily. "I won't deprive your father and brother the pleasure of telling you what *they* think of a yellow Mason."

"I SAW the entire disgraceful encounter," Space-Inspector Mason barked, "from our central visi-screen. I saw my own son run like a frightened rabbit from a ship carrying less power than his own. His actions were treacherous, cowardly and completely out of line with the code of honor established by Earth space-fighters and pilots. Therefore, with the authority vested in me by the Earth council, I order his immediate dishonorable discharge from the service."

Terry Mason listened in silence as his father pronounced sentence. There was nothing he could say, there was nothing that could be said in his behalf. He was standing at attention before his father's desk. There were several officers in the room, among them his brother, "Bats" Mason, one of the greatest space men in the universe. There was a deep absolute silence as his father stepped before him.

"Do you have anything to say?" the old man asked sharply.

Terry swallowed. His lean features were taut and straining under the pressure of maintaining a wooden, expressionless face. He wanted to cry out, to defend himself, to try and explain his horror and ungovernable terror at the sight of those Martian guns, but he forced the words back, squared his shoulders.

"No, sir," he whispered.

Space-Inspector Mason's stern, lined face worked for a brief instant and then he reached out a gnarled hand and ripped the blue-gray service stripes from his son's tunic.

"You have twenty-four hours to clear from MX," he stated. He turned then to his desk, picked up a small object and handed it to Terry. "This," he said, "expresses in a slight measure, my opinion of a man, who, by cowardice and cravenness, would endanger the lives of his fellow fighters, and undermine the prestige and esteem of his country."

Terry glanced at the object in his hand and stiffened. It was a tiny, unadorned wooden box. He lifted the top and saw that it was filled with yellow mud. It was part of the space-fighters tradition that this emblem, the tiny box full of yellow mud, represented the ultimate in disgrace and dishonor to the person who received it from his fellow fighters. To the coward, to the cheat, to the traitor, it was given as a symbol of baseness and dishonor.

His fist closed over the box tightly. He turned blindly for the door but a voice behind him said,

"Just a minute. You're leaving something."

He turned and saw his brother, "Bat", walking slowly toward him.

"Dad summed things up pretty neatly," he said coldly, "and all I can add is this." His open hand swung in an arc and landed with a staggering smack

against Terry's cheek. Four livid marks stood out against the whiteness of his face, as if they were burned there.

Terry backed a step with the force of the blow and tears of pain sprang to his eyes. Through them he could see his brother regarding him pitilessly. His brother's hand was stretched toward him, and on his wide palm rested a tiny wooden box, a replica of the one Terry had received from his father.

Terry took the box without speaking and left the room.

OUTSIDE in the bright glaring sun he walked stonily past the officers' quarters, past the mooring towers, past the mechanics' shop, until he neared a residential section, fenced off from the rest of the activities on MX. He turned in at a small steel house set back a little way from the walk. It was the home of Dr. Manners, stationary physician on MX.

Terry had been trying frantically, desperately not to think. There was one person he had to see before he could be alone with his thoughts and with himself.

That person was Eileen Manners, the girl he was engaged to marry, the girl who had whispered that she loved him on a dark night not too many weeks ago. Terry had been allowed to see no one since his return from his shameful battle in space.

He rang the bell and, a few seconds later, followed a soft-footed servant into the modest living room. He was not alone for more than a minute before a door opened and Eileen Manners entered the room. His heart leaped as it always did at sight of this slim, elfin-faced, auburn-haired girl.

"I didn't think you'd come," she said in a low voice.

He looked at her miserably. There was no anger or scorn in her face, but there was something that was worse. There was pity on her soft lips and in her eyes. The pity of a woman for something weak and helpless and crushed. It cut him more than his discharge, more than the two tiny boxes of yellow mud in his pocket. There was something else he had to know.

"Do you still love me?" he asked in a whisper.

The pity in her eyes faded.

"Yes," she said, "That's something I can't help. It's a disease I must get over. But any respect I had for you is gone."

He picked up his hat. He knew he had forfeited the right to plead for her understanding or forgiveness.

"You won't see me again," he said stiffly. "I—I'm sorry you put your money on a bad horse." He turned on his heel and left the room.

Eileen Manners stood still for many minutes after he left, her hands clenched over her breast, her eyes wet with unshed tears. When the sun's rays had faded from the room, she opened her hands and looked at the tiny wooden box, filled with yellow mud.

"I'm glad I didn't give it to him," she whispered.

FOR the next two months Terry Mason did his utmost to keep from drawing a sober breath. He very nearly succeeded. Mixing his diet with Martian Grano and Venusian rum, he was able to spend his waking hours in a semi-comatose condition which made it impossible for him to think. Thinking, he had discovered, in his few lucid moments, led him to a hell he could not stand. The only release came in the limbo of half-forgetfulness, induced by the liquors of the Universe.

It was during one of his comparatively sober spells that he learned from a gabby Martian dock hand that space-

base MX had been surrounded and blockaded by radio-controlled Martian ships for the past six weeks. It was a shock that knocked the fuzziness from his brain, left him completely sober for the first time since he had left MX.

For if MX was blockaded it meant that his father and brother and Eileen were in the gravest danger. He ordered another drink for his gabby informant and eased him down to the end of the bar, out of earshot of the other brawlers in the Martian saloon.

"What started it?" he asked tensely.

"Well, it's a long story," his informant said, filled with importance by his newly acquired role of news dispenser. "It started actually about two months ago when a Martian ship chased a space base fighter back home with its tail between its legs. We knew then that they wouldn't fight so we circled 'em with radio-controlled ships within another week or so. They haven't had any food or supplies since then. Only one of their ships managed to get away, but without food or supplies they'll soon fold up. But we aren't going to wait much longer. We'll just blast 'em out of the void if they aren't talking nice in another few days. Yes, sir, we mean business."

Terry paid for his drinks and left the bar, his thoughts churning desperately. He plodded hopelessly down a narrow Martian street, his soul black and bitter with self-accusation. Thoroughly sober, he realized with sickening impact, that he was responsible for the plight of MX. If he had fought it out, if he had maintained the prestige of the garrison, the Martian attack might not have been conceived.

It was a monstrous responsibility to have on his shoulders, a ghastly, terrible thing to accept judgment for. Something was writhing and turning within him, but something was growing too. It was rage, black and fearful. Rage at himself and rage at the cruel, mercilessly precise Martians.

Terry stopped in and bought a pint of violent Martian rum and returned to his small room. He planked the bottle down in front of him, unopened. He stared at it for a minute and then picked it up by the neck and smashed it on the floor.

It was a gesture, a symbol of accepted responsibility. For the rest of the night he sat staring at the floor. By the time he tossed himself onto his ragged cot, streaks of lights were seeping into the room.

But Terry Mason had a plan of action . . .

"ISH tellin' yuh Ish know sum'pn," the bleary-eyed, sodden figure at the bar protested drunkenly. "Whash a matta wih you? Don' cha believe me? Ish tellin' Ish know sum'pn about the space fleet. Used to be a spash fighter muself. Know all about 'em. Name's Mason. Got thrown out long time ago. They'll be sorry. They'll be sorry as hell when Ish tell whash I know about the spash fleet."

A Martian dressed in a gaudy uniform stepped alongside the grotesque figure mumbling at the bar.

"Did you say," he asked with sibilant politeness, "that the name was Mason?"

"Shupossin' I did," the figure at the bar turned to stare belligerently at the nattily dressed Martian.

"Brother of the man they call "Battering" Mason?"

"Yeah," the drunk mumbled sleepily, "good old Bats."

The Martian made a slight gesture to the bartender and then sauntered unconcernedly away. The bartender picked up Terry Mason's glass and refilled it. Then he dropped a white tab-

let into the foaming glass and waited for it to dissolve before he placed the glass back on the bar.

Terry Mason downed the drink in one gulp. Looking over his shoulder he saw several Martian soldiers gathering about him. He turned back to the bar to hide his smile. Things were working beautifully. For the past week he had staggered about the Martian coastal town, apparently as drunk as a lord, babbling about his strange military secrets. He was just about on the verge of trying something else when the bait had been gobbled up. Now he knew he was about due for a blackout. He had seen the bartender drop the knock-out drop into the drink.

He was feeling a little weak already. When he came to again, he realized, he would be thoroughly investigated, and well on his way to gaining the confidence of the Martian intelligence department. The one thing he wanted to know was the location of the radio base which controlled the planes which were blockading MX. With that information to give to the Earth space fleet, he knew the breaking of the blockade of MX would be only a matter of hours.

His knees wobbled a bit and then with unexpected abruptness, he crumpled to the floor.

The last thing he remembered was a crisp voice saying,

"Take it easy. That's 'Bats' Mason's brother."

WHEN Terry Mason opened his eyes again, he saw that he was lying on a cot in a small room. Before he could notice anything else a door clicked open and two uniformed Martians stepped into the room. One of them stepped forward, bowed slightly.

"Permit me to introduce ourselves," he smiled. "I am Rog and this is my associate Gonor."

Terry sat up on the edge of the bed. His head was pounding sullenly. He wondered vaguely how long he had been knocked out.

"I'm Terry Mason," he said. "Can you tell me where I am?"

"Not exactly," Rog answered with a bland smile. "We are on a planetoid in the void. The exact location I am not at liberty to divulge. You have been unconscious for two days. If you feel strong enough I would be honored if you would follow me."

Terry felt a vague premonition prickling his spine. Something was definitely screwy. The Martians were typical of their race. Smooth, bland, with hairless red faces and long feeler-like hands, and ridiculously short legs. He knew from his experience with them that he was being *told* to follow them and not *asked.*

He stood up and followed them through several short, narrow halls and into a larger room fitted up as an office. Several Martian officers were lounging against the wall, and they all smiled and nodded politely to him.

"First, Mr. Mason," the Martian called Rog, said affably, "we brought you here for a purpose. I might add that your charming impersonation of an inebriate was somewhat lost on us. We saw through that rather readily, I am afraid. I hope you are not disappointed."

Terry listened and waited. All of the blandness had dropped from the Martian's voice as he spoke. There was nothing but the flat ring of chilled steel left.

"Your brother 'Battering' Mason is here," Rog said abruptly. "We allowed him to escape MX and then captured him in space. It cost us four ships, but it was worth the price. He has been most obstinate in spite of our charming persuasions. That, Terry Mason, is

where you are to be of service to us. *You* will be the lever we use over your most obstinate brother. He knows the position of Earth space fleet Number X 1. We can not proceed in safety with our plans until we know its location and plans. So, with your help, Terry Mason, we will extract that nugget of information from your brother." Rog glanced at an orderly. "Bring the prisoner in," he said blandly.

Terry waited tensely, without speaking. He realized that he had blundered into a Martian trap, probably making things tougher for his brother. Something had hardened within him though as the Martian, Rog, had been speaking. Something that straightened his shoulders and bunched the muscles alongside his lean jaw. For the first time in his life he wanted to hit someone hard, and feel bones and flesh giving under his knuckles. The molten and latent steel in his body was tempering into a hard, flinty unyielding substance, and he was unaware of it.

A DOOR opened suddenly and a huge, familiar figure stumbled into the room, followed by two orderlies. Terry choked back a gasp of horror as he looked at his brother. For both of Bats' arms were set in splints and braced away from his body by steel supports. He glared around the room like a desperate bull and his eyes glinted red when he recognized Terry.

"So," he rasped, "you sold out to 'em, eh? If my arms were in shape I'd break your back for it. A coward and now a traitor. Pardon me, while I vomit."

"Bats," Terry said desperately, "you've got it all wrong. I'm—"

"Save your breath," Bats growled. "I'm not interested."

Rog smiled blandly.

"Too bad you two don't get along better." He turned smoothly to Terry. "Please observe your brother's arms. His extreme obstinacy irritated us so much that we were forced to be equally extreme. They were broken, one at a time, but unfortunately he still couldn't see the light. Now he is going to watch very unpleasant things happen to you and it is our hope that that will have the desired effect on his tongue."

"Go to hell," Bats roared. "I'll never tell you anything you'll want to hear."

"Remember that," Terry said, calmly, looking straight at his brother. "It doesn't matter what they do to me. The only important thing is for you to keep that big mouth of yours shut."

Bats looked at him strangely.

"I'll keep it shut," he said grimly. "I'm not anxious to save your hide from anything."

"See that you don't," Terry said.

Rog had listened with a polite smile to this exchange.

"Touching patriotism," he murmured. "Shall we put it to the test now?"

The words were a signal. Two soldiers grabbed Terry and led him out of the room. The last thing he saw was Bats looking after him, a queer, troubled look in his eye.

He was led down a winding set of steel steps into a large underground chamber and then through a series of narrow channels that led finally to a large, leaden door. The guards stopped, opened the door and shoved him into a dark vault-like chamber. Then the door slammed behind him with a little dry click of finality.

Almost instantly the room was flooded with strong light. Terry peered about in amazement. The roof of the room in which he found himself was formed of domed glass. The floors and walls were of what looked to be heavy lead. Looking through the glass roof he could see mechanisms of all sorts

grouped about. The primary instrument seemed to be a huge beacon light which was set on a huge universal joint enabling it to be turned to any desired direction.

TERRY heard voices then and a second later he saw the Martians Rog and Gonor ascending to the platform upon which rested the beacon light. Soon other Martians were visible peering down at him from the edges of the glass-doomed roof, and among them he could distinguish the massive figure of his brother.

"This interesting experiment," it was Rog speaking—evidently the room was equipped with a public address system, "will now get under way. I might add that when Mr. 'Battering' Mason is tired of it he can stop it by merely mentioning the position of Earth-fleet 1."

"Go to hell!" Bats snarled.

"I won't," smiled Rog, "but pray observe your brother. In a figurative sense he will soon be obeying your dictum."

The big beacon light was flashed on and its beam was directed into the lead-lined room in which Terry was confined.

Terry realized then with sudden horror that the domed roof was merely a gigantic lens. The stabbing finger of red hot light was moving toward him. Like a cat toying with a mouse, when it was within a few feet, it swung away and described a rapid circle about him. The heat was becoming unbearable.

Terry backed into a corner but the finger of heat followed him inexorably. He realized sinkingly that there was no place in the room where the beam could not reach him. He moved out of the corner and the beam flashed past his legs. Instantly the smell of smoking cloth assailed his nostrils. Glancing down he saw that his trousers had been singed brown. He heard Rog's gentle chuckle.

"We are only starting now," the voice was blandly cheerful, "in a few hours when you are no longer able to stand on your feet, aha! that is when the fun begins."

Terry heard Bat's rumbling cursing then, growing in volume and intensity.

"Take it easy, Bats," he yelled, "these penny ante hoodlums aren't worrying me."

Before the words had left his mouth the beam had risen swiftly and flashed across his face. Terry fought back a scream and sank to the floor, his whole body seemingly bathed in liquid fire. The beam played back and forth across his form and he could smell his clothes singeing and burning on his back.

With desperate strength he sprang to his feet and dodged out of the beam's focus. He dreaded to think of what would happen when his clothes were burned from his body and he had not even their flimsy protection against the scalding heat of the beam.

The hot finger of light was poking at him again, stabbing him with excruciating pain and then flicking away before he was blinded by its unbearable glare. The lead-lined chamber was like an oven now as heat from the walls and floor beat at him in heavy oppressive waves.

Then through the murky heat of his chamber he heard an enraged voice bellow,

"I'll tell you, you inhuman hounds. Turn that light off."

Terry clenched his fists.

"Don't, Bats," he screamed, "don't tell them, don't! It doesn't matter what happens to me."

LOOKING up he could see Bats' heavy figure being led through the room to the low platform upon which

the beacon light rested. Rog was smiling triumphantly at him and then, suddenly, things started to happen.

Terry saw Bats lunge forward and with his braced, outstretched arms sweep Rog and Gonor from the platform. There was a wild babble of voices and Terry saw Bats, a grotesque figure illumined by the reflected glare from the beacon, lash out with his foot and send the beacon spinning, deflecting the light from the lead-lined chamber.

Terry was instantly in darkness. Off to his right he heard a familiar click and he saw the door to the chamber swing open. A cautious head poked itself inside.

"Come on," the owner of the head called to someone over his shoulder, "the show's over. They must've burned the guy right into the floor."

Terry pressed himself flat against the wall and inched toward the open door. Two figures entered the room, passing within six inches of him. Without drawing a breath, Terry slipped from the room and slammed the door after him. He raced along the narrow corridor, one thought in mind, to get up and help Bats.

Rounding a corner he stumbled into an amazed Martian guard. His very speed saved him. They tumbled to the ground, the Martian beneath him. Terry's fist rose and fell savagely, again and again, until the figure beneath him was still. Then he appropriated his gun and hurried on.

He could hear sounds of confusion and battle above him and as he turned into a winding stair-case he realized that he was on the right track. At the top of the stairway was a heavy steel door, standing ajar.

Terry kicked it open and leaped into the room directly above the torture chamber he had just left. Rog and Gonor were standing with their backs to him, facing Bats, who was held by one of the Martian soldiers.

Rog wheeled as he heard Terry enter the room. His hand streaked toward his gun but he was too late. Terry's gun coughed twice in his hand and Rog turned slowly, a funny bland smile on his face and pitched to the floor, holes burned through his forehead and body.

The soldier holding Bats dropped his gun nervously to the floor and Gonor made the last mistake of his life diving for it. Terry's third fiery pellet hit him just as his long hand curved over the butt of the gun. He sprawled to the floor a grotesquely twisted heap.

"Good work," Bats snapped. "But we're not through. Keep these other monkeys covered while I give you the set-up. The building that houses the radio apparatus that controls the planes blockading MX is just off to the left of us. We can't leave without destroying that."

Terry glanced in the direction indicated and saw a low squat house, set in a vast network of wires and conduits. Four sentries patrolled back and forth before it. Terry realized then, what he had taken for granted when he first entered this room. That is, its dome and walls were made of heavy glass, obviously for observation purposes. He snapped his fingers suddenly.

He waved his gun menacingly at the few cowed Martian soldiers and then jumped to the big beacon light. Flicking the switch on, he swung it around until its brilliantly strong beam cut through the heavily glassed walls and focused on the squat house which was the heart and pulse of the blockade of MX.

Almost instantly he could see wisps of smoke rising from the wires and connections that led into the radio rooms.

"That'll do it," he said grimly. "In

about twenty seconds that fleet of ships will go smack out of control. This beacon, magnified and concentrated will burn that whole group of buildings to the ground in an hour."

Bats was grinning broadly. "I'll bet that's one use they didn't figure on it being put to."

TERRY turned to the three remaining soldiers.

"If you boys want to see tomorrow's sunrise," he snapped, "you'll do as you're told. Take us to the space ramps or mooring tower and don't make any detours. Get moving."

Outside the build they could see dozens of guards and soldiers swarming about the burning radio building.

"That might keep 'em occupied for a while," Bats said hopefully. "Anyway, let's move."

They moved. The three soldiers, with Terry's gun prodding their backs, moved swiftly through the labyrinthine buildings until they emerged on a small mooring platform, to which was moored one Martian fighter craft.

Terry turned his guns back on the soldiers.

"Back into the building," he said grimly. "If I didn't have a kind heart I'd leave pieces of you from here to there. Now get!"

The soldiers had barely turned their backs when Terry shoved Bats into the fighter-craft and dove in after him, slamming the inner-lock door behind him. Miraculous luck had been with him at every turn, but he could hear the soldiers screaming for help in the building and he knew that seconds were precious. Racing to the pilot's room he nudged the reverse levers just enough to clear the nose of the ship and then he shoved the acceleration lever all the way forward. The ship blasted off the void in a zooming, whistling arc.

"Here comes company," Bats yelled, from a side visor-glass.

Terry peered into the visi-screen and saw a Martian black fighter flashing from a tower and arcing about to meet his own ship. The scene was hauntingly similar to his first combat in space. But Terry was not thinking of this. He was merely thinking of doing a job. His hand on the control lever was steady as he whipped the ship into a dizzy side-spin.

As he passed over the back of the enemy fighter his free hand tripped the tommy cannon release. A blistering barrage blasted from the nose of his ship almost melting the other ship in two with its intensity. In the visi-screen he followed the flight of the damaged ship as it side-slipped and plunged back to the Planetoid.

"Neat," Bats cried enthusiastically. "Who said you couldn't handle one of these babies?"

Terry set the automatic landing gear and passed a hand over his eyes. Everything was blacking out before his eyes.

"I guess nobody did," he muttered foggily, and then he rolled off the pilot's seat and onto the floor.

WHEN Terry Mason came to again, he was shrouded in bandages and plastered with ointment and salves. He was lying on a precariously narrow hospital cot, in the officer's ward on MX. Eileen was holding his hand and his father was standing at the foot of his cot, looking as stern and judicial as usual.

"The blockade broke about six hours ago," his father said quietly. "The entire ring of steel collapsed. Everyone on MX owes you their lives, son."

Terry looked up at Eileen and winked.

"As a sick man," he said soberly, "I insist on one prerogative. Namely

one hour alone with my future wife."

"Can't be arranged," a heavy voice at his side said, "unless you get a couple of horses to move me."

Terry turned and saw Bats propped up in the bed to his right, a six-inch smile decorating his face.

"Family reunion, eh?" he said.

"You said it," Bats cried. He looked up at his father and winked solemnly. "If the younger Mason keeps it up he'll be a darned good addition to an already good combination."

Which, Terry realized complacently, was about the highest accolade he would ever receive.

« MASTER MIMICS »

By GUY FAULDES

IT has been almost a sacred tradition for all mystery fiction writers to endow their Japanese characters with masterful cunning, unbelievable ingenuity and numerous other brilliant attributes. But it is becoming increasingly evident that these sketches of Japanese character are certainly not consistent with the facts. The true Japanese is a copyist and, as such, will always be a step behind the more mechanical nations.

Illustrating this is a classic incident, at which all Asia is currently amazed. It seems that in developing their navy, Japan invited all shipbuilders to submit designs and requirements.

This was strictly on a cash basis at first, but then the Japanese got the bright idea of saving themselves a little money and gaining a little prestige. So instead of ordering their ships from the builders of other nations they merely copied the plans carefully (and there is no international law against the practice) and then returned them to the designers with the explanation that they were "so sorry, but they had changed their minds."

This went on for some time. The Japanese were getting the best ship-building brains in the world—and they were getting them absolutely free.

It was a fine set-up from their standpoint but the firms from whom they were borrowing designs became vastly irritated. Most of these firms retaliated by simply refusing to send any more blueprints to Japan, but one firm in Glasgow, which had been godfather to a greater extent than the others, decided on a little practical joke.

When the next demand for designs reached them the canny Scotch firm submitted elaborate specifications and blueprints. The plans were for a luxury liner of the most expensive type and the Japanese Admiralty was delighted with them. But as was the custom the designs were returned in a few months, and with them came a polite note explaining that it was not feasible to build just yet and so they were returning the oh-so-nice blueprints.

The Japanese got busy then, working from the Scotch designs, and soon the ship was ready for launching. It was launched on the Tsushima straits with all sorts of colorful fanfare and decorations. Official dignitaries were present and flowery speeches were made. Then, amidst this spectacular ballyhoo, and while thousands screamed in delight, the mighty ship slid majestically down the launching pier and entered the water with a splash.

But almost instantly the cheering died away to a stricken, horrified silence. For it was tragically obvious that something was wrong! The vessel was heeling over!

In ten seconds she was on her side. Before hastily dispatched tugs could reach her, she was bottom up and before the sun sank that evening this latest Japanese ship of the line was resting on the bottom of the straits.

The Scotchmen had deliberately designed the ship to capsize, relying on the Japanese to follow the plans to the last rivet.

The even more humorous aftermath to this incident was that the Japanese, still unaware of what had happened, solicited still other plans from the Glasgow firms and others. The story had leaked out to the shipbuilders however, so they all began to submit false designs and spurious specifications to the Japanese.

Even today builders are working on false designs and four capsizings have been reported just within the last year or so. It is all very puzzling to the little men from Nippon but so far they haven't caught on. So remember this, you fiction writers: the next time you have your Japanese character performing all sorts of miraculous mechanical feats, it just ain't their natural-born nature!

Meet the Authors

STANTON A. COBLENTZ

I WAS born in San Francisco, California, on August 24, 1896; and, before I was ten years old, underwent an adventure as hectic as anything in the science fiction stories I was subsequently to write. The earthquake and fire of April, 1906, was to provide me (although I did not know it at the time) with material for some of the scenes of calamity later placed in strange and remote worlds.

Following the disaster, my father—whose business had been wiped out—removed with his family to Stockton, about eighty miles to the east; and there I remained until my graduation from High School in 1913, when I entered the University of California.

I had at the time an idea of following a scientific career, but eventually entered the law school. However, finding the work much to my distaste, I quit when within a year of receiving my J.D., and decided to follow a writing career.

My decision was reinforced when, about a month after I had made it, I won a twenty-five dollar prize in a Peace Poem Contest, conducted by the San Francisco *Chronicle*.

Shortly afterward, I secured a job reviewing books at space rates for the San Francisco *Argonaut* while working for my Master's degree at college; and after receiving this degree in 1919, was employed by the San Francisco *Examiner* as a writer of daily feature poems, which included everything from rhymed attacks on the weather to versified laments at the rising price of eggs.

In September, 1920, I left to seek my fortune in New York, where I was to remain for eighteen years. In the metropolis I found not *one* literary task awaiting me, as I had hoped, but a wide variety.

I interviewed visiting celebrities, such as Chesterton, Tagore and Einstein, for *Success Magazine*—which, unfortunately, proved anything but a success!

I reviewed books for most of the metropolitan dailies, including the *Times, Sun, Evening Post, Herald*, etc., and also for magazines such as the *Bookman, Dial*, and *International Book Review*; there were times when I had as many as twenty or thirty new books in my room, awaiting attention. I shudder to think what sort of attention some of them probably received!

At the same time, I started writing books of my own. My first volume of verse, *The Thinker and Other Poems*, was published in 1923, my first book of prose, *The Decline of Man* (a book which was then regarded as too grim in its predictions, but might seem almost to err on the milder side nowadays!) was issued in 1925. Subsequently I have published six other volumes of prose and eight of verse; and, in addition, have compiled two anthologies of poetry.

It was in 1925 or 1926, before I was aware of such a possibility as a science fiction magazine, that I began writing science fiction stories. My first was *The Blue Barbarians*, and my second *The Sunken World*, both of which were to see publication in *Amazing Stories Quarterly*.

During my years in New York, I had made occasional trips back to California, accompanied by my wife; but it was not until 1938 that I was able to fulfill my old ambition of returning to my native State.

In the summer of that year, we removed to a cottage among the redwoods of Mill Valley—a spot which we chose because it combined proximity to the great city of San Francisco with an inspiring rustic environment in which it was possible to work undisturbed. There I have continued my work as a free lance writer, turning out science fiction stories, poems, articles, etc.

The life here is a simpler one than it was possible for me to lead in New York; but with books, friends, a dog, the possibility of almost daily refreshing long walks in the country, and—not least important—a waiting desk and typewriter—I find no reason to regret my return to the West.

Stanton A. Coblentz.

Mystery of the MUMMY

by DUNCAN H. FARNSWORTH

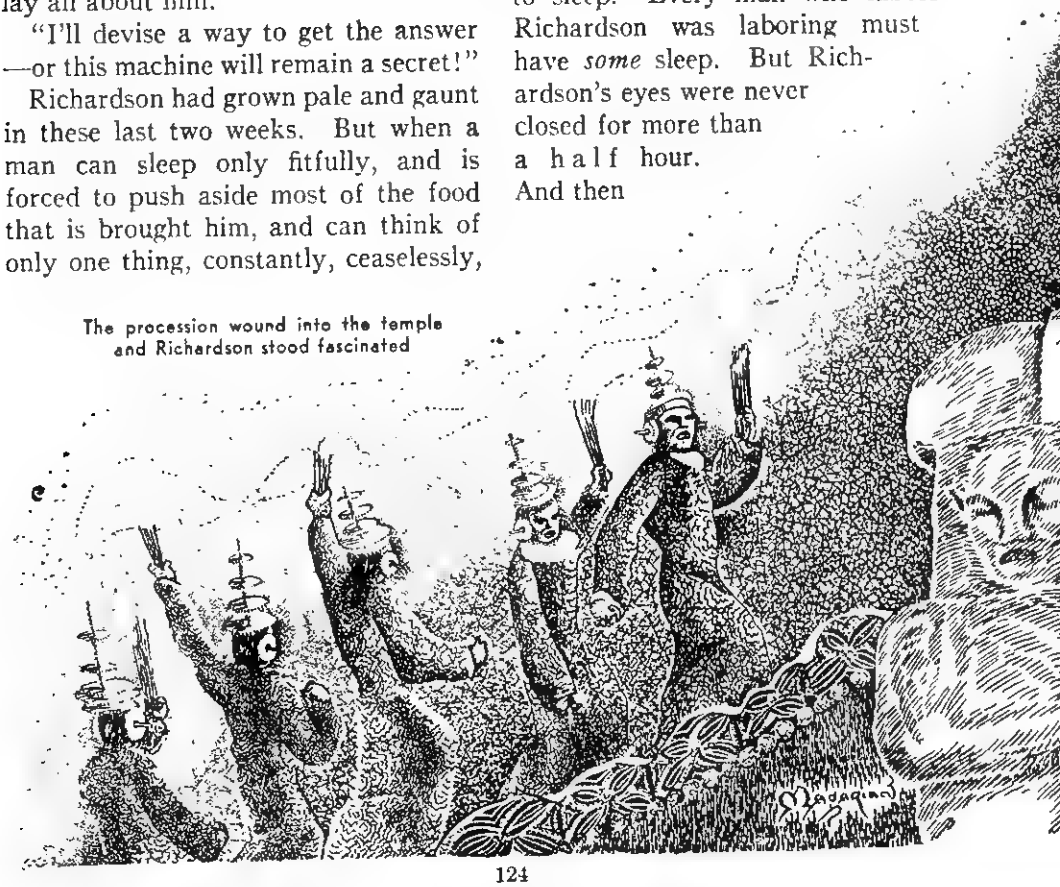
"I'VE got to know!" exclaimed Richardson. "I've got to know why that that thing fascinates me so!"

He stared wildly around the laboratory; at the intricate apparatus that lay all about him.

"I'll devise a way to get the answer —or this machine will remain a secret!"

Richardson had grown pale and gaunt in these last two weeks. But when a man can sleep only fitfully, and is forced to push aside most of the food that is brought him, and can think of only one thing, constantly, ceaselessly, endlessly, he is bound to suffer physically.

And so it was with Richardson. They brought him the food he sent for by telephone, but he ate only enough to keep the heart in him beating. He tried to sleep. Every man who labors as Richardson was laboring must have *some* sleep. But Richardson's eyes were never closed for more than a half hour. And then



The procession wound into the temple and Richardson stood fascinated

Whose was the mummy that rested on the altar of this barbaric temple far in the future? What was the fascination that drove Richardson to risk death for it?

he resumed work in his laboratory—where he had confined himself—and continued his driving, brainsapping toil.

Two weeks before, Richardson's machine had been perfected. Two weeks before, Richardson himself had made the first test in it. He had traveled through Time. Traveled far beyond the realm or ken of man—centuries into the future.

Richardson's time machine had taken him to a vastly different world, had dropped him inside a huge, crude temple. A temple with a great altar. An altar enshrining a Thing in a Case.

And as Richardson had looked upon the Thing in the Case for the first time, it had seemed to reach out toward him, to pull him irresistibly forward. Actually, however, it didn't move at all. For it was nothing but a body. A charred, mummified body inside a glass case.

It was quite dead, Richardson had realized as he stood trembling before it. And he realized, too, from the signs of human habitation around the temple, that this was an idol, a thing of worship, for the curious, savage people of this future world.

But there was something about the damnable Thing, something beckoning, sinister, that made his blood run cold. And then the drums had started pounding outside the temple. Drums; and wild, weird, barbaric chanting that had forced Richardson to tear his gaze from the faceless head of the Thing. He had turned then, and ran to the safety of his time machine, returning through the centuries, across the gulf of Time, until he was at last back in his laboratory.

But in Richardson's brain, stamped deeply as though by a searing brand, there was the memory of the Thing in the Case. It beckoned, with a grim and ghastly persuasion against which he was powerless.

Four times after that, Richardson had returned to that wild world of the future, returned to the Thing in the Case. And each time, as he stood fascinated before it, the savage drums had taken up cadence, and wild chanting had forced him to flee back across Time.

IT had been Richardson's intention to announce his startling invention to the world immediately upon his return from his first trip into Time. He knew that then he would be equipped with positive proof with which to confront a scoffing world. But now his first journey into Time was two weeks old, and there had been four other journeys besides that. Yet he still withheld his discovery from the men of science, keeping in the sheltered secrecy of his laboratory and delaying the inevitable hour of triumph that would be his reward.

Richardson himself could not explain why.

He knew only that now he was again making delicate adjustments on his machine, so that he could again enter the strange, incredible, terrifying world of the future. So that he could again stand before the ghastly idol in that barbaric temple of centuries to come. By now he was helpless, hopelessly enslaved to his invention—and the irresistible lure of the Thing in the Case.

Richardson's eyes burned feverbright as he stepped back after making the last adjustment on the time machine.

"I'll return from that temple only if I discover the fascination, the hold, of that damnable Thing in the Case," he told himself feverishly. And the winking lights on the board of the time machine seemed to flicker in sardonic agreement, as Richardson stepped into the machine.

AS on the previous occasions, Richardson came out of the blackness of space and time to find himself standing alone in the rude barbaric temple of the future. As before, the savage scent of earth and flesh was strong in his nostrils. And as before, Richardson looked up toward the huge altar on which the Thing in the Case reposed.

His heart hammering heavily, Richardson advanced slowly toward the altar. The very presence of the Thing seemed enough, this time, to make his temples throb with the hot blood of excitement. He could feel its pull even more greatly than before. And he walked as if he were scarcely conscious of doing so, as if some unseen force were guiding his footsteps.

Sweat broke out afresh over Richardson's body as he advanced slowly, inexorably, toward the altar. And then he was standing before the Thing in the Case.

It hadn't changed, charred and shrunken, lying grotesquely rigid. But Richardson's palms were damp, and his breathing came faster. He was like the rabbit before the cobra—powerless, spellbound.

Desperately, he tried to fight off the grip of the Thing. Desperately, he forced his mind to a comparative calm, trying to sweep in every last detail of the Thing coldly, appraisingly, scientifically. He must find out. He had to find out—!

Around the charred neckbone of the Thing there was a circle of steel, as if some wire ornament, a primitive necklace, had been worn there during the life of the Thing. One of the hands, the left, charred and almost beyond recognition as such, was reaching up toward that neckpiece. The pose was like the unconscious gesture of a woman idly toying with a necklace.

Had this, then, been a woman? Some primitive of the future? Who had she—?

Richardson's thoughts were ebbing swiftly away, as though some horrible power were sapping them, drawing them forcibly from his brain. Again he felt the awful hypnosis of the Thing in the Case taking hold. Again there was a violent, trembling, physical weakness.

Richardson was trying with every last atom of soul and will to fight this damnable drowsiness, this insidious hypnotism that was creeping over his very being, drawing him closer, closer, to the Thing in the Case.

And suddenly, Richardson heard the drums throbbing.

ABOVE the barbaric cadence of the drums, a brutal chanting had risen. Richardson had heard the drums and the chanting before, but never had they sounded as they did now.

Richardson tried to wheel, for the drums and the chanting were drawing closer and closer to the temple. Soon these strange people would be filing into their place of worship, and Richardson didn't care to think of what his fate would be were he found standing there before their idol.

But Richardson found himself powerless to move.

Louder grew the sound of the drums and the chanting, and Richardson, frozen there in fear and sudden sickness, could discern the flares of their torchlights bobbing down the tangled path that led to the temple door.

Richardson looked once into the death-mask face of the Thing in the Case. Looked once and screamed wildly, for it seemed to be grinning at him, evilly, sardonically!

And Richardson's own voice, ringing forth, broke the spell that had held him motionless. He turned now, sobbing hysterically, and dashed down the steps

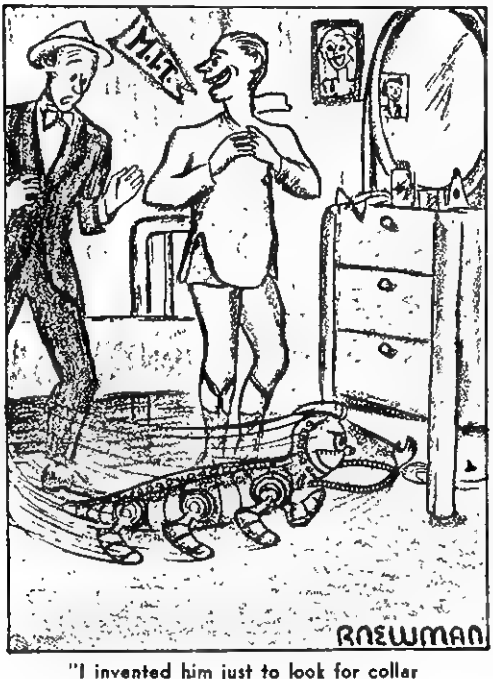
of the altar. Twenty yards away, twenty yards across the blood-stained earth of the temple, lay his only chance of escape—the time machine.

Richardson ran, and twice in that short stretch he fell sprawling. He had risen for the second time, sobbing, half-screaming, when a sudden, vast swelling of noise told him that the barbaric procession had entered the temple!

Wildly, Richardson grabbed for the levers of his machine, not daring to look back over his shoulder. The drums and the chanting had stopped abruptly, and Richardson heard a hoarse voice bellow something stridently, the sound ringing loudly through the silence in the temple. He had been seen. He knew that, even as he worked frantically in adjusting the mechanism on his machine!

"I've got to get out of here!" he gasped.

His hand was on the lever when a screaming, whip-like whistling shrieked through the air. Something caught Richardson around the neck, wrapped around tightly, stranglingly.



"I invented him just to look for collar buttons. Handy little devil, isn't he?"

He tore at it with frantic fingers of his left hand, while his right pressed down the lever that would send the time machine back into the past of this future world.

The hurled band of steel was choking him, and a loose end of it fell across the control panel. He realized the danger instantly. A short now would be disastrous. He'd be marooned in time; trapped here in the future.

He was conscious of the fact that he was already hurtling back in time, and the temple and the priests had vanished. In their place was a vague gray blur.

But his instinctive motion to prevent the metal band from contacting the control panel was too late. Orange sheets of flame burst from the winking lights on the board. Orange splashes enveloped him in angry flame. Electrical energy seared his body horribly, blackening his skin.

Richardson tried to scream as blackness curtained in toward him. He was conscious now that the machine had stopped. Around him once more were the gloomy confines of the temple, but this time it seemed different; a newer, less ancient building, whose walls were not so blackened with time as the place where the Thing in the Case lay enshrined on its ghastly altar.

And before darkness closed in completely, Richardson saw the altar, saw that on it was no case, no charred mummy, no fetish that was a god to those who worshipped here.

And as he died he realized the truth. He knew how the Thing had gotten upon the altar; how the priests had gotten their "god." It had come to them in flame—in the ruins of the time machine; *his* time machine.

He was the Thing in the Case!

ARISTOCRATS OF THE ATOMIC TABLE

By C. E. CONNERS

CHEMICAL elements are like human beings Some of them possess a tolerant, democratic outlook on things and have no objection to mixing companionably with their neighbors while others are inclined to tilt their noses and, figuratively speaking, give their fellow elements the cold shoulder.

The constituents of the atmosphere furnish extreme examples of this. Oxygen is an exceptionally democratic element, the best of mixers, combining with everything or anything that will meet it half way

Fire is merely an example of this eagerness of oxygen to join with another element—usually carbon or a carbon compound. Rust is actually the visible evidence of oxygen's bourgeois joining with molecules of iron. Every time we draw a breath it is to permit oxygen to enter the lungs, and hence the blood stream, to make combinations in our cells.

But very different is the action of the other element of our atmosphere, the unfriendly, undemocratic nitrogen. This is present everywhere, bathing the inflammable material, rubbing shoulders with the iron molecule, but in its case there is no chemical result whatsoever. No matter how close the physical contact, nitrogen snobbishly refuses to engage in any chemical union.

The true aristocrats of the atmosphere, however, are certain elements, spoken of as the rare gases of the atmosphere. These gases are argon, xenon, neon, krypton. Discovered by Lord Raleigh and Sir William Ramsey they were found to be the real hermits of the elements, refusing to enter into any coalition with anything.

Associated with them is another element of equal aloofness, helium. Hellum alone of this patrician family has become known, at least by hearsay, to the man in the street. Helium got its name into the newspapers because it was found in such quantities that it could be collected and used to fill balloons.

So the next time you take a deep, invigorating breath of fresh air—just thank your lucky stars that oxygen is the democratic "good mixer" of the elements.

MYSTERY
OF THE
MARTIAN PENDULUM

by
Thornton Ayre & A. R. Steber

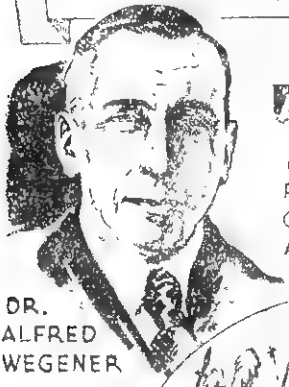
Remember "Locked City"? Certainly you do! How could you forget it! Well, here's the story you've been waiting for . . . a tale that will snatch the laurel away from that first Ayre classic. And this time—another favorite author of yours has added his talent to produce a mystery masterpiece! By all the Gods of Mars, don't miss this story in the big

OCTOBER ISSUE
AMAZING STORIES

ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS
AUGUST 8TH! DON'T MISS IT!

Scientific

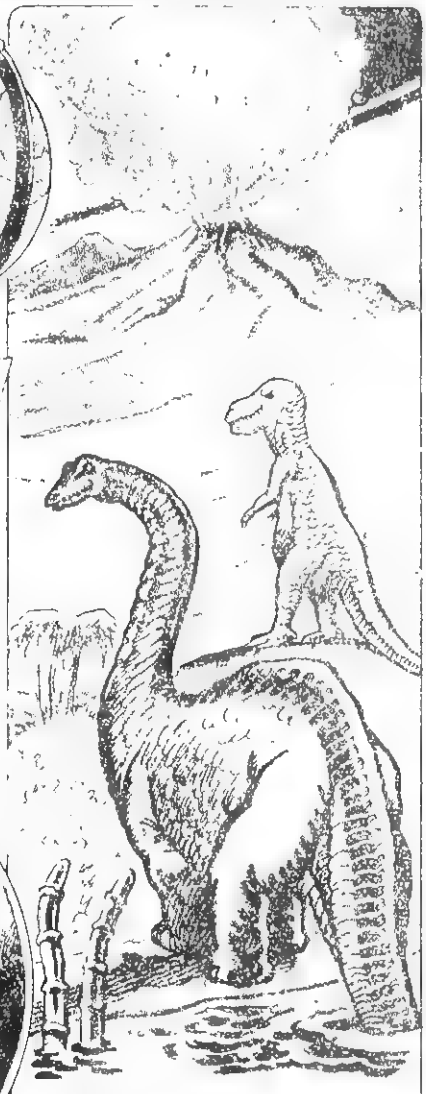
WERE THE WORLD'S CONTINENTS ONCE JOINED TOGETHER INTO ONE HUGE LAND MASS ? AND DID THIS MASS BREAK UP ?



DR. ALFRED WEGENER

ACCORDING to WEGENER THIS DID HAPPEN. OTHER GEOLOGISTS POINT TO THE SIMILARITY OF FORMATIONS IN THE ALPS AND HIMALAYAS.

YET NEITHER FACTION HAS POSITIVE PROOF. STILL, PRESENT DAY NATIVES OF THE EAST, MONGOLIANS CALLED THE GOND RACE- HAVE GIVEN THEIR NAME TO THE MYTHICAL SUPER-CONTINENT



Was GONDWANALAND'S DESTRUCTION THE ANSWER TO THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE GIANT LIZARDS ? DOES MAN, THE MAMMAL, OWE HIS EXISTANCE TO A TOTAL CATASTROPHE THAT SHATTERED A CONTINENT INTO SIX PIECES ?

Mysteries

by L. TAYLOR HANSEN

Gondwanaland, the mystery continent of the past ... did it really exist? Did it really split up into the continents of the present?

HAS your eye ever been halted by the strangely parallel Atlantic coastlines of Africa and South America, as you stood idly twirling a globe of the world? Perhaps you even remarked aloud, that these two continents looked as if they had been two pieces of the same mud-pie. If you did think that, you may be surprised to discover that you were not the first to think so

As far as we know, that man was a geologist by the name of Snider who in 1858 published a map showing the Americas pushed against Europe and Africa. Contemporary with Snider was another geologist named Suess who saw rather significant patterns in the world's mountain ranges.

The maps of these two men, together with the increasing knowledge we are accumulating of strangely similar land fossils and similar rocks across what are now wide ocean barriers, as well as the peculiar variation of ancient climates from the distribution of present climates, have paved the way for the present revolution among certain modern geologists against long-accepted views of continents and oceans.

The first guns fired in that revolution were the theories of Equatorial Drift by Kreichgauer and F. B. Taylor who believed that all continental masses are slowly drifting from the poles toward the equator. Then in 1922 came the theory of Wegener,[1] which asserts that a single continent was recently (in geological terms) torn open at the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and that both halves are slowly drifting westward.

The main trouble with Wegener's theory is that the Alps and Himalayas were built from rocks which were once laid down in a warm, swift-flowing equatorial sea which geologists have named The Tethys.

This main objection, as well as a few minor ones, to the Wegener theory, caused Staub in 1928 to revive a variation of Equatorial Drift. However, none of the theories fit all the facts, and as our knowledge increases, the old ideas become more and more untenable.

For example, there are strangely similar mountain ranges running across the Atlantic, raised in the same epoch and composed of the same series of rocks. Wegener likened them to "writing across a torn page." This likeness across the northern block of continents is thought-provoking, but it is startling across the southern block.

Scientists have begun to analyze this "mud-pie" piece by piece.[2] And they are beginning to believe that it not only includes the continents of South America and Africa, but also India, Australia, Antarctica and perhaps a sunken Lemuria They have given this latter mythical continent a name, and today that name is as well known to geologists as are the names of any of its parts After a primitive tribe who seemed to have come from its eastern portion, it has been called Ancient Gondwanaland, and around its existence is waging one of the most extensive scientific debates of all time.[3]

Not that the opponents of the drift theories agree as to the extent of their opposition any more than the proponents can agree about the manner in which the continents moved, but every geologist of note is taking sides, while experts in the fields of ancient animals, ancient climates, volcanics and even ancient man are being drawn into the controversy.

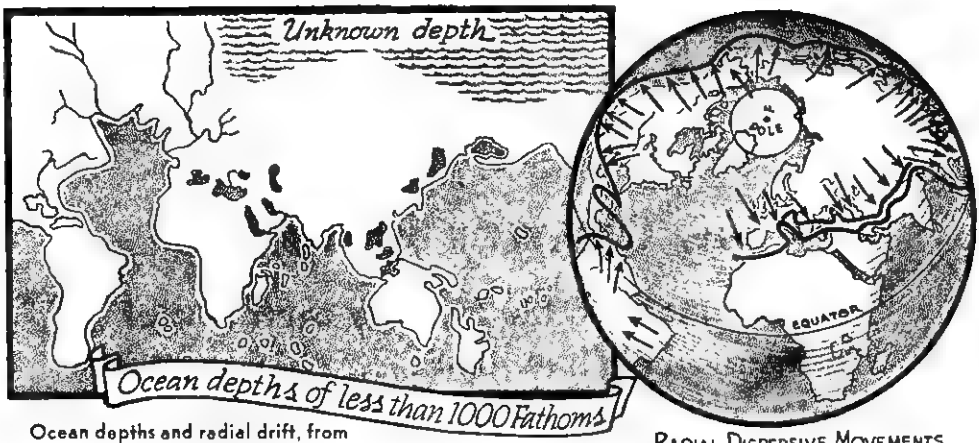
For example, an exponent of drift may ask his opponent:

"If you insist upon an ancient world of wide ocean barriers, how do you explain the fact that members of the ostrich family are to be found in

[1] *Origin of Continents and Oceans — Alfred Wegener.*

[2] *A Geological Comparison of South America and South Africa—Alex. L. Du Tost.*

[3] *A Symposium of Continental Drift.*



Ocean depths and radial drift, from the maps of Johnstone and Taylor.

RADIAL DISPERSIVE MOVEMENTS

Australia, Africa and South America?"

Of course, the opponent cannot answer. Yet he may retort with an equally unanswerable:

"If the continents moved that far, what caused the movement?"

In order to find the solution to this question, the exponents of drift turn to the experts on volcanics, and we have a new group of theories upon molten rock circulation,[4] periodical rock melting due to radium heat,[5] etc., none of which again seem to fit all of the facts

Was there an Ancient Gondwanaland in the southern hemisphere during the days when armored monsters wallowed through the swamps of tropical Wyoming?

Without a technical discussion of rocks and fossils, let us consider one of the significant facts. During the Mesozoic,[6] all of the fractured parts of Gondwanaland supported massive sheets of continental ice. It is just as amazing for the trained scientist to discover the evidence of ancient polar conditions in parts of Africa and India as it would be for the layman, but facts are facts and somehow, they must be explained.

Is it possible to reconstruct this ancient continent in some manner so that we can obtain a mental picture of it as we have formed mental pictures of the shape of Africa or South America? Yes, if we go about it as the scientists have been doing for the past ten or fifteen years, and shall be doing for some years to come.

If possible, use a globe. Trace off South America and paste it against Africa, allowing a slight space for broken fragments. Now do the same for all land south of the Mediterranean-Caspian-India line. Take all of India. Close the Red Sea and Persian Gulf as you paste the land against the globe. Australia is then twisted back into the Indian Ocean while Antarctica is brought up against the southern boundary. It is now easy to see that our picture-puzzle seems to have lost some small fragments in the Indian Ocean. That missing part is the much-discussed "Lost Lemuria."

The very name suggests to zoologists its necessity, for it was bequeathed by a zoologist who found no home for the lemur, but discovered that this peculiar little dog-snouted monkey inhabits the shores of the Indian Ocean at various points, as if it had scampered there for safety when its homeland sank below the waves.

Wegener, on the other hand, insists that Lemuria is in reality only the much-wrinkled land we know as India. If we were to straighten out all the mountains which were folded up when India was driven into Asia, the resulting land would stretch so far down into the Indian Ocean that there would be no need for a "Lost Lemuria," he argues. Be that as it may, the shield of the ancient continent is so badly fractured upon this side, that a satisfactory reconstruction is almost impossible

Before what was undoubtedly the world's greatest cataclysm torn asunder, Gondwanaland was a continent of great rivers, high mountain ranges and deep valleys. One of its mightiest rivers was, without doubt, the Atlantic, which had its rise in the high range of the Falkland Mountains and flowed north to the Tethys Sea. This mountain range, fragments of which are to be found in both Argentina and the southern tip of Africa, seems to trail its highest peaks above the water into the Indian Ocean.

The eastern range of Gondwanaland connected Australia and the fractured garlands of islands which we know as the East Indies. As for the center of this vast continent, Brooks[7] tells us that:

[4] *Holmes and others.*

[5] *Joly.*

[6] *Mesozoic from the Greek words "Middle Life." The earth's areas are divided into:*

a *Protozoic—"Before life."*

b *Paleozoic—"Ancient life" (ruled by fishes).*

c *Mesozoic—"Middle life" (ruled by dinosaurs).*

d *Cenozoic—"Recent life" (ruled by mammals).*

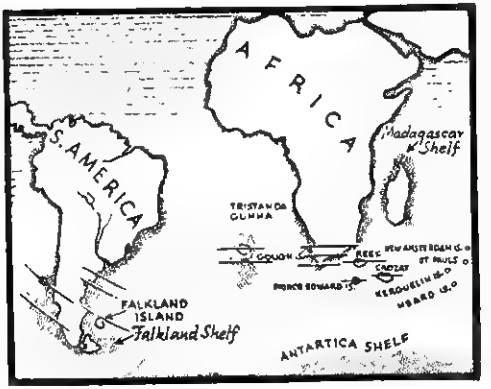
[7] *Climate Through the Ages—C. E. P. Brooks.*

"We may, therefore, take as a working hypothesis, a great plateau in the interior of Gondwanaland, rising gradually to an elevation of 10,000 or 15,000 feet."

This great plateau in the interior formed the backbone upon which were born the giant ice sheets. They moved south because the Tethys which washed the northern shore of the continent was a warm sea whose initial temperature was around 70°. Thus the long southern slopes were polar, while the shorter northern slopes were covered with a pleasant, temperate forest.

But how can we fit the ice of India into this picture? Brooks suggests that a wide valley extending down the northern slopes could carry an arm of the ice some distance toward the Tethys. Or does the presence of ice suggest that India's place in the original continent did extend further south, as Wegener suggests?

As for the Tethys, this oceanic river, corresponding to the Gulf Stream of today, divided when it reached the borders of Gondwanaland. One arm swept north in what is known as the warm, coral-



Twisting of S. America as evidenced by the fractured Falkland Range. Map by Hansen

reefed Volga Sea, which washed the tropical jungles of Europe and gave a hot climate to Siberia. The other arm continued along the shore of the vast southern continent, sweeping over what is now Mexico and Central America, until it had again joined the Pacific.

At the end of the Mesozoic, massive Gondwanaland began to break up. The rivers widened into seas. Giant volcanoes belched forth molten rocks. Wide cracks opened in portions of Africa and sheets of lava poured forth, as much as a mile in thickness. The Tethys disappeared as its bed was twisted and crumpled up to form the Alps and Himalayas. Was Gondwanaland crashing into Asia? Many scientists think it was.[8]

For untold milleniums, in dying spasms, the convulsions continued, spreading into the northern continental block. The tropical swamps of North America and Eur-Asia where armored dragons had ruled a nightmare world, gave place to high plateaus and mountain ranges. The gigantic lizards died of starvation and of cold, or were buried beneath the red floods of gushing lava.

After their destruction, nature began to experiment with that delicate and intricate organ—the brain. It was only their gradual extinction which gave the mammals, and later man himself, a chance to live.

Thus because men have read the story of ancient polar climates in what are now trackless jungles, found dinosaur[9] bones and delicate ferns in what are now burning deserts, or have discovered that the volcanoes of certain islands throw up torn fragments of the old continental rocks,[10] geology is being rewritten. Gradually the veils of mystery are being pushed back from that library which is the past.

Not that any more than a bare beginning has been made. Most of the story which has been engraved upon the earth's rocks, is, of course, still unknown. Man has not passed the primer stage as yet in his attempt to read that library, but he can already sense that entire volumes are missing.

Will man someday perfect a diving apparatus which will permit him to penetrate the depths of the sea in search of those lost volumes? And when he does, will he find anything more haunting than the story of the Mesozoic, which looms through the mists of the past? Or anything more cataclysmic than the fate which splintered to fragments, even as a plate of china might have been shattered, the massive continent of Ancient Gondwanaland?

[8] *Daly—This Mobile Earth. (Among many, but the most interesting.)*

[9] *Dinosaur from the Greek dino (terrible) and sauer (lizard).*

[10] *The researches of Daly upon Ascension Island in the Atlantic and Murray in the Indian.*

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M son my son. You have
broken your poor fathers heart!"

Dr. LOUDON'S ARMAGEDDON

by ALEXANDER BLADE

One man's science could win the war—and that man's science was Nazi Germany's . . .

BERLIN after the war was gray and somber. People went about their business, if they had any, in a kind of daze. Young men, hard-eyed and bitter, thronged the parks, or stood about listlessly on street corners.

The atmosphere was depressing. It reeked of defeat and frustration. I thought of New England in midsummer, and cursed certain officials as I waited in the anteroom of the Allied High Commissioner.

Presently an adjutant approached.

"The general will see you now," he said, with a half smile.

General Wright looked up appraisingly as I entered. He was a tall, impeccably uniformed man, correct, determined, honorable to the core. In his hand was a low, underslung pipe. Everything about the General suggested drive and poise.

"Mr. Sherman," he said, rising. We shook hands. "I trust your curiosity has its limits." He smiled disarmingly.

"Frankly, no," I admitted. "I'm practically bursting with questions. But I've been given to understand your position. I'm just here for atmosphere, General. Not for exposés, not for sensations. That will come when Dr. Goebbels finishes his autobiography."

Wright sat down, relieved.

"Glad you said that," he told me, tamping more tobacco in his pipe. "The situation is delicate. Well—what can I do for you, young man?"

I pulled up a chair, lit a cigarette.

"My paper sent me over for a series of human interest articles. You know—how the Germans are taking their defeat. The effect it has upon the ex-soldier, the ex-*Luftwaffe* pilot, the scientists who created so much *ersatz* material."

Wright scribbled something on an official notepad.

"This pass," he explained, "will gain you admittance to German army barracks, scientific laboratories, internment camps. You can even interview Dr. Goebbels, if you like. There is only one condition."

I rose with a knowing grin.

"You want to see my copy before I cable it to New York."

General Wright held out his hand.

"I have to, Mr. Sherman. We can't permit anything to be published about the Nazis which would further work prejudice to Germany. As Allied High Commissioner, my principle task is to bring this country back into the family of nations."

I knew what he meant. With Germany bankrupt, no stable European economic system was possible. It was

the Allies' intention to put the country back on its feet.

Humanitarian? Not at all. Realistic, impersonal and practical.

I THINK I told a white lie. Not that I had any choice. But my newspaper credentials were only a front. My real job was to track down the whereabouts of Dr. Hendrik Loudon.

You remember Loudon, surely. An obscure little man, with a straggly vandyke beard, spats, unpressed shirt and rumpled tweeds. Yet the greatest scientist on the European continent, before the war.

Experimenter with U-235, Dr. Loudon. Nobel Prize winner. A man whose vision encompassed the stars, who dreamed of a better world. A genius, so wrapped up in his work that he could not manage his own finances, cross a busy street without frightening traffic, or understand the vicious game of power politics.

He had been at The Hague, in the government laboratories, when the Nazis dropped in. Molested him? Don't be stupid. They'd surrounded him—with the most glittering galaxy of Nazi scientists extant.

The entire output of a Czechoslovakian pitchblende mine had been turned over for his experiments. Day and night the research went on. Neutral diplomats, besieged by scientists in their own lands, sent back word that Dr. Louden was working for the Nazis. He was in good health, and very courteously treated.

Then, suddenly, Dr. Loudon disappeared. At least no further word was available. The Nazis shut up like clams, except to protest bitterly that they had not harmed the Dutch genius in any way.

That was how matters stood when Uncle Sam packed me off to Germany, after the war.

"Find out what happened to Dr. Loudon," I was told. "With international unrest still widespread, it would be fatal for his U-235 formulas to fall into enemy hands. Don't muff this assignment, Sherman. It's a life and death proposition!"

I thought about my mission as I hailed a taxi to Berlin's great Templehof Airport. General Wright's pass secured me ready passage on a converted Lockheed bomber. Fifteen minutes later we took off, an Allied pilot at the controls, for Munich.

The ship set down at Munich promptly at two in the afternoon, refueled, and roared into the wind across the airdrome, this time for Berchtesgaden. I passed the final stage of the trip playing poker with an American army captain and an Allied inspector.

Berchtesgaden, erstwhile Bavarian mountain retreat of Adolf Hitler, clings chastely to its verdant Alpine perch. The estate is now a museum, which will be deeded over to Germany when the Allied Armies of Occupation return home.

We landed, I shook hands all around, and with the aid of my pass commandeered an army staff car. The chauffeur, a blond husky Kansan, nodded with a grin when I told him the object of my visit.

The winding mountain road dipped under the *Fuehrer's* magnificent chalet by a thousand yards. I stared up at it with interest.

"Even as an architect, Adolf was no slouch."

The Kansan scowled.

"For my money, sir, he was a first-class heel."

"That's not the point." I passed him a smoke, and we lit up. "To Germans, Hitler is still '*Me und Gott*'—both of

them. As well try to erase Napoleon's memory from French minds."

The driver's lip curled.

"You can have the French, too."

I hid my grin, and let my eyes enjoy the scenery.

THE great scientific laboratory blended almost maliciously with the mountain landscape. Enemy bombers, on determined demolition flights before the armistice, had missed their objective every time.

Nothing was visible except at close approach. Then the forest of spruce opened reluctantly, to reveal a solid two acres of one-story concrete buildings.

The scheme of camouflage was well-nigh perfect. Not that provision had not been made against air assault. The laboratory boasted a fully equipped underground annex, a sort of miniature Maginot Line. No matter what happened, the regimented geniuses of Hitler's Reich could carry out their evil researches undisturbed.

I told my army chauffeur to wait an hour or so. If I did not return within that time, he was free to leave, and I would get back to the airport by some other means.

There was no difficulty getting into the reception hall. My pass reassured the guard on duty. But the officer behind the reception desk was a shrewd article.

"Dr. Loudon," he said slowly. "You wish to investigate what he is doing."

My heart missed a beat. He was still alive, then!

I made my voice casual.

"Nothing has been heard from Dr. Loudon since the Nazis invaded Holland. My paper would like me to interview him personally. You understand—a routine report on his health, and so forth."

The officer's eyes were sharp. An Englishman, his attitude was just as clipped as his Oxonian accent.

"I'm afraid, sir, I do not understand. How did you know Dr. Loudon was here, in the first place?"

I shrugged.

"Just a guess. Hitler kidnaped scientists from all conquered Europe. After the war, naturally, our suspicion they had been sent here was confirmed. Smart boy, Adolf—he wanted to check up on them personally."

The Englishman studied me for a long moment.

"Does your paper always print nothing but the truth?"

I drew in my breath. "That depends. Sometimes some things are best left unsaid."

The officer pressed a desk button, and a corporal briskly approached.

"Corporal, show this gentleman to the suite of Dr. Hendrik Loudon." The Englishman looked me directly in the eyes. "You will confer with me, please, before you leave?"

"I'm going to get a shock. That's what you mean, isn't it?"

At least we understood each other.

AT first I didn't see Dr. Loudon. I saw his old valet, Martens, a loyal family retainer if one ever lived. He fairly bristled, so it seemed to me, with a fierce sense of protection toward his famous master.

"Dr. Loudon?" he said gruffly. "Dr. Loudon is occupied. You cannot disturb him. No one can. I am the only one who sees Dr. Loudon."

I found a chair, lit a cigarette. I blew smoke rings for two or three minutes. Finally the old fellow unhinged his lean shanks and settled irately onto a sofa.

"Is it that bad?" I asked.

His faded blue eyes smouldered.

"He will never be the same again."

I glanced around the room. It was a sort of sitting room, *gemuetlich,* full of overstuffed furniture, heavy drapes, an etching here and there. One portrait caught my eye, but it was the work of a master photographer, not an etcher.

I went over to examine it. A handsome lad, the boy in this picture. Erect, arrogant, obviously a *Luftwaffe* pilot. I studied the features, mentally comparing the jaw, the eyes, the rather stubby nose with another picture in my mind.

"His son," I ventured. "How old is he?"

"Twenty-three," said the old valet. "He was only twenty-three."

A moment afterward the truth struck home.

"This doesn't make sense! He's wearing a German airman's uniform. That's not a Dutch uniform—I know my military insignia!"

The aged servant came over to my side.

"You will write," he said, emphasizing every word, "that Dr. Loudon is in good health, happy, and that he is leading his accustomed life. He is not available to visitors. His—his work takes all his time."

There was a long moment of silence.

"That's my part of the bargain. And yours?"

He sighed, bitterly, wearily, and crossed the room to an old mahogany desk. He fumbled in a compartment, and brought out a slender, leather-bound volume. It was a diary, in a neat, precise hand. The entries were all in German.

"Dr. Loudon's?"

"Yes. He always wrote in German. It was once the international language of science, you know."

I SAT down in a corner under a floor lamp and began to read. My German isn't fluent, but learning it had been part of my job. The months fell away, as I read, and soon there was nothing in the world but me and that diary. Once again the war lived, naked and frightful.

The entry for April 15th, 1940, read:

It is now midnight. Hans has come into my room, and gone. Oh my son, my son, what have you done? You, my own child, flesh of my flesh, a secret member of the Dutch Nazis! You are an airman, a bomber pilot, and you are secretly crossing the border tonight. You tell me that the Germans will invade our country in a few weeks, perhaps only a few days, at the most. I cannot believe you are a traitor to the Queen, to our beloved Netherlands.

May 10th:

Hitler struck today. Our eastern provinces have been overrun by the Nazis. It is dreadful beyond belief, this outrageous violation of our neutrality. Hans, Hans, what have you done? I cannot sleep, your action has torn my soul into shreds. Now the German bombers are overhead, frightening the people. I shall work through the night. It will keep me from going mad.

And on May 15th:

They came for me today. I was working in my laboratory, and they came for me. Hans himself was there, flushed with victory, especially commissioned by "Der Fuehrer" *to welcome me to the Third Reich. I am to continue my research at Berchtesgaden, assisted by leading German scientists. Hans will visit me often. I may even have my old valet Martens. Every courtesy will be shown . . . Oh Hans, Hans, you have broken your father's heart.*

I mopped my forehead with a handkerchief, and read on. The entry for July 1, 1941, made my blood congeal.

Tonight is the great experiment. Hans himself was from the first directed to carry it out. One-half hour after sundown, as I write these notes, he must now have taken off from his airdrome in Northern France.

There would be one bomber, he said, and he would be at the controls. There would be a great escort of fighter ships. And there would be one bomb—oh, my dear God, only one bomb . . .

How could I have contrived it? Uranium isotope—U-235, an explosive horrible beyond description. One-quarter of an ounce, fitted into the very core of a thousand-pound bomb.

Hans will head for the heart of London, he said. At twenty thousand feet, he will press the bomb release. The destruction will be magnificent, awe-inspiring, as terrible as the eruption of a volcano.

The heart of London will be wiped out. Even the subways beneath the Thames will be gutted. The loss of life will be unparalleled. The English will riot, overthrow Churchill and beg for peace . . .

Oh, but they will not, Hans! They will not do this thing, because your great bomb will never reach the earth. I fooled the Nazis, you see. I not only developed the U-235 concentrate, but in my apparent zeal I was permitted to work on the bomb as well.

It is a quarter after ten, now. I watch the hands on the wall clock, and the blood drains from my heart. By normal calculation you should be over London, Hans. Your eager young eyes gleam, and your fingers itch at the release lever.

Now! You press it, hard . . . You are dead, Hans. You are a billion little atoms, you and your squadron, a scattering of dust above a dark and silent city. The concussion is terrific. Hundreds of miles away, other airplanes are tossed about like corks on a stormy sea. On the ground below, all London rocks with the vibration . . .

U-235, Hans. U-235, which detonated the moment you pressed the bomb release. There was a tiny ratchet on the bomb's surface. It pressed inward, just an eighth of an inch, as the projectile slid down the bomb rack.

An internal electrical circuit was closed. This set up a flow of neutrons, which in turn detonated my precious U-235 . . . You thought the magnesium cap on the bomb would explode my U-235 when the bomb came in contact with the earth.

You were wrong, Hans. The magnesium cap was connected with—nothing. It was a cruel and treacherous knob, quite useless . . .

I SET down the diary, trembling. My shirt was damp with sweat. I rose unsteadily to my feet, staring at Martens.

"The Nazis—never knew?"

"No one ever knew," he said simply.

I followed him on tiptoe across the room. He opened a paneled door, easily, silently. A gray-haired man, his lined face serene as a child's, stood beside a laboratory table, next to a window.

He measured out little jots of chemicals, sprinkled them on the surface of water-filled test tubes. Brilliant purple and red colors bubbled up, a-gleam with the sun's golden shafts.

"He is quite mad," Martens breathed softly, as he shut the door. "He never remembers a thing."

I shook hands, and left without another word. At the reception desk, the English officer glanced up sharply, as I failed to halt.

Then he saw the tears in my eyes, and hurriedly gave his attention to other matters.

DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

SCIENCE FICTION AID TO BRITAIN

Sirs:

I would like to announce the formation of the BSFWRS (British Science Fiction War Relief Society) of which I am the director. The purpose of this society is to furnish British sf fans with USA magazines. All who wish to donate any copies of science fiction magazines to this cause, which is run on a non-profit basis, please send in your magazines now

We also welcome contributions of US stamps with which to mail these magazines to British fans who cannot get AMAZING STORIES and *Fantastic Adventures*. Addresses of British fans also wanted.

JOHN CUNNINGHAM,
2050 Gilbert St.,
Beaumont, Texas.

Here you are, readers. Your chance to aid the British in a science fiction way. They can't get copies of American magazines now, unless you send 'em. The editors think it is a fine idea.—Ed.

FROM A SOLDIER

Sirs:

Have just finished reading the current issue of AMAZING STORIES. I generally hang around the canteen waiting impatiently for it to show up. It's a darn good magazine—always something new and exciting in contrast to the same story in every western or detective thriller.

Of all your stories, the best, I believe, is "Survivors From 9000 B.C." Can't you follow up that good start? There's real story material there! What couldn't a man do with modern weapons and knowledge in the Middle Ages?

I've always devoured E. R. Burroughs' stories, and so do many of my colleagues

Of course I like your quarterlies. Here in the army we have to watch our pennies.

PFC DANIEL W. CROCKETT,
US Army,
Somewhere in USA.

You'll be seeing more of Williams' stories in A. S. And about that modern knowledge in the Middle Ages—we have exactly that yarn coming up very soon

In fact, you soldiers will find plenty of excitement coming up. In the magazine, we mean. We've got some special stuff on tap. Take the September FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, our companion magazine, for instance. There's a swell war yarn called "Miracle At Dunkirk" in it, and another one called "The Throne of Valhalla." Just what you guys ought to eat up.—Ed.

LYNN BRIDGES, YOU'VE MADE THIS YOUNG MISS ANGRY!

Sirs:

I never neglect to read the Discussions part of AMAZING STORIES, and I just read the letter by Lynn Bridges, in which he slams AMAZING STORIES something terrible. He says he'd gladly trade the whole mess for one good story.

I think he's crazy, and I don't mind telling him so. The stories are swell, and I know quite a few people around this neck of the woods who think so too.

I may be only 17, but I know what I'm talking about. I would like to see more stories by Leigh Brackett soon. "No Man's Land In Space" was swell. I also liked "The Invincible Crime-Buster." If this doesn't appear in print, I will write Lynn Bridges directly and tell him just how I feel about his letter.

BETTY ANGOOD,
Rt. 1, Box 450½,
Gardena, Calif.

Thanks, Betty! We have a personal weakness to being championed by the fair sex, and we appreciate you sticking up for us this way. We'll get you more stories by Leigh Brackett and Henry Gade, you can be sure.—Ed.

ANOTHER CHAMPION!

Sirs:

Although I have not yet read my July copy of A. S., I have read Discussions, and some of the brickbats made me so mad I decided to write my views. I have read A. S. regularly for about 15 or 16 years. I have occasionally read other sf mags, but only A. S. steadily.

As for Chester Britt's slam against the John Carter stories, I think he's all wet! If he thinks the John Carter stories are "childish nonsense," that's his business. But a great many of us look forward to those adventures eagerly, and I for one

will be sorry to see the last.

I am glad to see cartoons coming in "threes" and "fours" instead of "ones" or not at all.

As far as I can remember, the best stories of late were:

"Black Pirates Of Barsoom"—fine

"The Lone Wolf Of Space"—not enough of this style appears!

"Mystery On Planetoid Ten"—very good.

"Survivors From 9,000 B C"—very interesting.

BARNEY BARNES,
P. O. Box 44,
Reno, Nevada.

Well, you certainly are an old-timer when it comes to AMAZING STORIES! *And you ought to be qualified to state your opinion. So thanks to you, too, for your rallying to our rescue —Ed.*

ACTUAL WEIGHT OF GOLD

Sirs:

Don Wilcox, author of "Invisible Raiders of Venus" should look up the actual weight of gold. In his story, some 40 men are going to carry ten billions in gold to the space ship and near the end of the story he makes a statement that it got off with three truckloads of gold.

As ten billions in gold, at its present price of $35.00 per ounce, would weigh over 9,500 tons, these must have been some trucks!

I wonder if you ever check obvious facts when you accept a story? I remember many years ago, in one of your earlier issues, you had a story about the earth running into a watery nebula that made a second deluge. The author did not explain how such a vast nebula could exist in the cold of outer space and retain its fluid state.

As a matter of fact, if there had been any such mass of frozen vapor, at the temperature of space, it would have brought another vast ice age to the globe

WALTER X. OSBORN,
Santa Cruz, Zambales,
Philippine Island.

Yes, sometimes we do check, Walter. But we slipped on this one. But so did you. The actual weight of 10 billions of dollars in gold is 8,928 tons 1,130 lbs. But as you say, those were some trucks!

Now about that frozen nebula. A nebula is so tenuous that actually, when you are within it, it is only slightly less dense than a vacuum! So, how could the vapor in a watery nebula be ice? And how could it be colder than space itself, in which the earth normally floats, WITHOUT FREEZING IN ANOTHER ICE AGE?

That "X" in your name marks the spot, Walter! And you're on it this time!—Ed.

LOCKED CITY

Sirs:

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29x4.75-20	2.10	.95
29x5.00-19	2.25	1.05
30x5.00-20	2.40	1.05
6.25-17	2.45	1.15
28x5.25-18	2.45	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.45	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.50	1.15
31x5.25-21	2.80	1.15
6.50-17	2.75	1.15
28x5.50-18	2.75	1.15
29x5.50-19	2.75	1.15
6.00-16	3.15	1.45
6.00-17	2.85	1.15
30x6.00-18	2.85	1.15
31x6.00-19	2.85	1.15
32x6.00-20	2.95	1.25
33x6.00-21	3.10	1.25
32x6.50-20	3.20	1.35

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29x4.75-20	2.10	.98
29x5.00-19	2.25	1.05
30x5.00-20	2.40	1.05
6.25-17	2.45	1.15
28x5.25-18	2.45	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.45	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.50	1.15
31x5.25-21	2.60	1.15
5.50-17	2.75	1.15
28x5.50-18	2.75	1.15
29x5.50-19	2.75	1.15
6.00-16	2.15	1.45
6.00-17	2.80	1.15
30x6.00-18	2.85	1.15

31x6.00-21	$2.85	$1.15
32x6.00-20	2.95	1.25
33x6.00-21	3.10	1.25
32x6.50-20	3.20	1.85

TRUCK BALLOONS		
Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.10	$1.95
7.50-20	3.35	1.95
7.00-20	4.80	2.95
7.50-20	5.15	3.75
8.25-20	6.75	4.95

H. D. TRUCK TIRES		
Size	Tires	Tubes
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32x6	6.95	2.75
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have been reading your mag for three years, rain or shine, even if some guys say it isn't science fiction any more.

There are a few things I want to get off my chest about the July issue. First, the cover. I don't know where you dug it up, but you should change your brand of artist. The next thing is that story by Williams. I expected something more from him.

I guess this is all I can moan about in this issue, because on the whole the rest of the mag was o k and so was Paul's back cover.

A few days ago I heard two fans chewing the fat about "Locked City." Perhaps you can tell me in what issue that story ran, or maybe you have one in stock you will sell me. I'll sign off now, because I have a date with the new *Fantastic Adventures.*

ROBERT A. NELSON,
2044 North 34th Street,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

What with the new pavement on 35th Street, you ought to be less inclined to "moan" about things, but kidding aside, what was wrong with Williams' story? We thought it was pretty nice. And the cover artist is Stockton Mulford, who seems to be good enough for the slicks, occasionally, so why not for us?

"Locked City" appeared in October, 1938. You can get a copy by sending 20c to the Circulation Department.—Ed.

RIGHT-ABOUT-FACE

Sirs:

I find myself, after my last knock letter, doing a right-about-face. I will admit quite freely that Margarian is GOOD—in spite of my opinion of that pic for Three-Eyes. Better than most of your artists, in fact. That still doesn't alter my opinion of the first one, you notice.

I will even go so far as to say he resembles Finlay in some ways—though not quite so good—and tops all your artists (inside, this is) except for Paul!

As for covers; I believe that this artist-collaboration business is a good thing. Morey and Krupa on Suicide Squadrons, and now McCauley and St. John on Goddess of Fire—though I don't see how your magazine ever gets to its subscribers. Anyway, chalk up a couple of brilliant nebulae for the July jacket.

Stories? Well that's comparatively easy this time. Give it to Burroughs. The Farley-Nelson combine can have second—but they'll have to share honors. Cabot's Terrible People are quite a bunch. You know, it's too bad that typewriter had to be destroyed. I should think Terrence Titwillow might have had him a time. Third, Powell; fourth, Harris; fifth, McGivern; sixth, Bellem. Short and sweet. Best pics? Magarian (you guessed it).

PAUL CARTER,
156 S. University Street,
Blackfoot, Idaho

Glad to see you've changed your mind. This is

only the beginning. Magarian has a lot of good ones coming up.—Ed.

ANOTHER READER BURNS UP!

Sirs:

I enjoy this part of the magazine I've read it in many issues of AMAZING, but until tonight I've never thought that I might write also. I guess I'm just burned up at a letter I see in this issue beside me—July.

As I don't know the fellow, and I do not wish to incur his ill-will, I won't mention his name. His letter was conventional enough until the last paragraph, where he takes on a supercilious, holier-than-thou, dyed-in-the-wool-stf-fan and turns loose a slap in the face to new and younger readers by bragging that he is "not 9 years old" and that this was not his first letter to appear in print, nor did he think AMAZING was swell.

Gosh! Why did he even bother to write? Maybe he's ten already—getting old, son! And did you have a letter or two somewhere else? So what! I'm an old fogey of three times nine, and I'm proud to say this is my first letter to a fan department.

I like stories like "Survivors from 9,000 B.C." and "The Invincible Crime-Buster," and in general I like science fiction stories to be unadulterated science fiction. I do not like stories that can have a few "props" changed in order to make it another kind of story. "Pepper Pot Planet" is one of these. Just a Mexican revolution in disguise.

All the artists are good, with Krupa and Paul in the lead and Fuqua bringing up the rear. The covers are swell, but please, can't we have a scientific theme? Some of them look too adventurish. (Scuzit?).

I like your Quarterly issue. I was reading it on the way to work on a street car, and someone asked me if I had a mail-order catalogue. Boy, that's a lot of reading for a quarter!

ROBERT JORDAN,
831 Central Ave.,
Alameda, Calif.

Well, this department certainly turned out to be a battleground this month! But hop to it, boys. Nothing like a good fight!

Your opinions on what science fiction should be, basically, are interesting. Thanks.

Which brings us to THE END for this month Drop us a line about this issue.—Ed.

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CONVOY TO ATLANTIS

An amazing story of the Battle of the Atlantic. How are German pocket submarines sinking ships so far from reasonable bases? Are there more fantastic angles to this war than we know? What is the real secret behind American convoy talk? Here is a story that may or may not be fiction. As told by:

WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Edward H. Holt, 1409 W. 6, Little Rock, Ark., would like to play chess by mail with residents of the U.S.A. or Canada . . . Frank McCourt, 516 W. 140th St., New York City, has current SF and fan magazines which he would like to exchange with fans who can call evenings . . . Fred Heinichen, 152 W. 62nd St., New York City, would like female pen pals, 16 to 18, in his city . . . Thomas McIntosh, 1210 N. 19th St., Superior, Wisc., has back issues of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for sale . . . Richard L. Hiatt, 1410½ Gallia Ave, Portsmouth, O., would like correspondents in Central and South America, Philippines and Asia, interested in stamp collecting, view card collecting and science fiction; would like to trade "Warlord of Mars" for "After Worlds Collide," or Burroughs' stories . . . Joe J. Fortier, 1836 39th Ave., Oakland, Calif., Andover 2559, wishes to announce the operation of "The Golden Gate Futurians" fan club . . . M. H. Kritzberg, 4728 N. Crawford Ave., Chicago, Ill., has several hundred AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and miscellaneous SF magazines, in good condition with both covers, for sale; send for list . . . Dick Waite, Rural Route No. 1, wishes to change his address from Banker, N.Y. to Barker, N.Y. . . . Frank Robinson, 6636 S. Sacramento, Chicago, Ill., wishes to trade SF magazines and wants information about joining the Chicago Science Fiction League; would also like to hear from Chicago fans . . . Fred Heinichen (address above) wants the address of a Manhattan science fiction club . . . Claude Held, 494 Carlton St., Buffalo, N.Y., will trade SF magazines for U.S.A. and British North America stamps; also wants to trade stamps with collectors in Canada, etc. . . . Edwin Rothouse, 1727 Cheltenham Pl., Philadelphia, Pa., wishes foreign pen pals and will send all correspondents at least one SF magazine . . . Robert Richel, 424 Paxton St., Paterson, N.J., wishes correspondents, preferably female, 14 to 17; will reply immediately . . . Stanley Werbin, 589 Blake Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y., is confined to bed and is anxious to correspond with fans . . . Stanley Arnold, 600 W. Clinton St., Frankfort, Ind., wishes to purchase SF and fantasy magazines or books and early issues of AMAZING STORIES . . . Osmond G. A. Salmon, c/o The Modern Optical Co., 122 Tower St., Kingston, Jamaica, B.W.I., needs a great number of back issues of AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES; collectors: communicate with him . . . Joseph Dorn, 1314 Franklin St., Northside, Pittsburgh, Pa., will sell to the highest bidder rare books of Burroughs'; also wishes to correspond with those interested in chemistry, physics, etc., and will trade stamps for magazines and books (SF only) . . . John Ah Rin, Waiakea Mill, Hilo, Hawaii, 22 yrs., wants female correspondents on the mainland; will reply promptly . . . Ronald Clyne, 2112 W Ainslie St., Chicago, Ill., is desirous of obtaining A Merritt's books in good condition, the "Skylark" series, and Francis Stevens' books . . . Anyone wishing to swap matches with many or few people, for all types, write to International Match Club, 780 Edgewood Ave., New Haven, Conn, Robert H. Gray, President . . . Thomas Brackett, Box 214, Winnsboro, La., would like to hear from SF fans in Louisiana interested in forming a SF Society . . . Lucas Da Silveira, Salvo Bldg., Montevideo, Uruguay, 34 yrs., architect, wishes to correspond with girls or ladies . . . Mary G. Byers, c/o H. Chaney, Bird Rd., RFD 5, Springfield, O., wants to dispose of a SF collection . . . Thomas E. Townsend, 1524 W. 28th St, Little Rock, Ark, will reply promptly to all those interested in collecting and exchanging picture post cards . . . George Gardner Barker, Halfway Pond, Buzzards Bay Post Office, Mass., would like to obtain the "Skylark" series . . . Simpson M. Ritter, 1160 Simpson St., New York City, has a large collection of first edition magazines to trade for historical and biographical books; also 1940 and 1941 SF magazines for late 1941 copies . . . Alfred Edward Maxwell, 118 W. Madison St, Opelousas, La., needs short stories, science or SF articles, poems, cartoons, etc., for STFANITE . . . Ruth Barron, 232 Beach 132 St., Rockaway, N.Y, wants to hear from male correspondents, 19 to 25, interested in classical music, dancing and fantastic fiction; those in Service (foreign especially) are most welcome . . . Edgar Schlossberg, 1674 Macombs Rd., Bronx, N.Y., wants to hear from those interested in joining a SF organization, living in New York City and between 13 and 17; call Lu-7-2467 . . . Stanley Amsiejus, R.F.D. 1, Pelham, N.H., wishes to buy and sell various magazines . . . Frank Hoffmann, Pascal Hotel, Peoria, Ill., would like to make friends through the mail . . . Walter Nemunis, 101-56 115th St., Richmond Hill, N.Y., wants to hear from those interested in starting a club . . . F. R. Stofer, 237 Baker Hall, O.S.U., and R. J. Owens, 239 Baker Hall, O.S.U., Columbus, O., wish to hear from those interested in travel, athletics, science, etc; they prefer young ladies, but will reply to all letters . . . Chester Hoey, 301 6th Ave, Brooklyn, N.Y., will trade a chemistry set and harmonica for a professional snare drum . . .

A CITY ON MERCURY

BY HENRY GADE

Our back cover presents artist Paul's conception of Mu, the capital city of Mercury. Here is the scientific basis on which his conception is based

WHEN we visualize the city of Mu, on Mercury, we must take into consideration quite a few conditions that are peculiar only to this planet, and no other. It is the smallest of the major planets, and is nearest of all to the sun. It is about 3,000 miles in diameter, and its orbital distance from Sol is 36,000,000 miles. However, due to the extreme eccentricity of its orbit, it approaches to within 28,500,000 miles and recedes to 43,500,000 miles.

It revolves around the sun in 88 of our days.

The density of the planet is between that of Mars and the Moon. Its mass is one twenty-seventh that of Earth.

It presents one face always to the sun and 27% of its surface is continually sunlit. Other portions present enormous temperature changes through each "day." Its dark side is intensely cold. It has an atmosphere, although tenuous.

The inhabitants of Mercury, therefore, are more than likely insect-like, of the type that can withstand great heat. And undoubtedly they rarely venture to the surface.

Thus, Mu, the city of Mercury, and of the Insect Men, is an underground city, and we can logically assume that it would be ideally situated on the floor of an ancient, and completely dead, volcano. On Mercury there would be no volcanic activity, this having long since ceased.

Due to the intense heat of the planet's youth, and its nearness to the sun, there might possibly have been a natural process of refining going on and volcanic lakes of almost pure crystal could have hardened in dead craters, thus offering an ideal medium for carving out crystal cities, perhaps even utilizing natural caverns caused by huge "bubbles" in the mass.

Quartz, mixed with metallic elements, would result in vividly colored effects; copper, iron and nickel causing their respective vivid hues to be imparted to the quartz. It would be a city of rainbow beauty.

Certainly, the refracted illumination of the giant, nearby sun, reflected down into the depths from the crater rim, would serve to permeate through the whole city in a natural manner, and thus provide a constant and almost unvarying source of natural illumination to the inhabitants of the city.

The most precious element, to a Mercurian, would be water. On Mercury, water would be the most highly priced commodity.

On the volcano-crater floor, quartz tanks would be constructed, to catch and preserve, tightly sealed against further evaporation, all condensation that would seep down from the shadowed walls. This would exist as a condition due to the variation in Mercury's rotation. Extreme temperature changes would cause rapid evaporation and in turn, rapid condensation with each "day."

And the only place where the water could be collected would be at the base of crater walls where the atmosphere would be most dense and most capable of supporting the vapor in such a form and provide a temperature drop of enough duration to condense it and cause it to trickle down into the more cool darkness of the crater bottom, and to the city which awaits it so eagerly.

The civilization of the Mercurians would be quite high, and agriculture would be an amazing science. If they failed to utilize every possibility of their heat-torn world, food would fail them, and they would cease to exist. Mechanically, perhaps, they would not be too far advanced, nor would they need a mechanical civilization. The only travel done would be possibly through tunnels from cavern to cavern, from crater-city to crater-city. And most of this would be "afoot."

Power would not be possible as on Earth, through the energy of waterfalls, which do not exist. It is more logical to assume that crystals, mirrors, etc., placed high in the craters, or on the planet's surface itself, would utilize the tremendous energy of the sun, thirty times as bright as on Earth. From these "sun motors" power would be converted by "loss-proof" steam engines into electrical energy, which could be stored in natural batteries far below the surface.

But Mu would essentially be a city of insect people, and would prove absolutely uninhabitable to visitors from Earth. The temperature range would be too great to support human life. We would be glad to leave, after a few hours, encased in our asbestos suits. Mu is quite close to hell!

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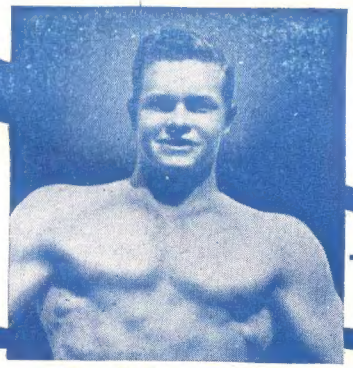

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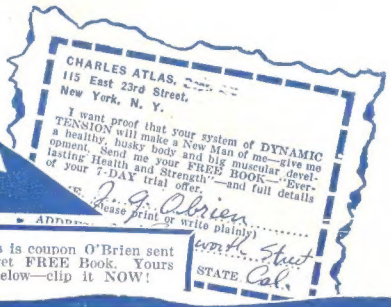
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